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## Starting an Exercise Program

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Out of all the natural remedies for depression, nothing is more effective than a healthy dose of exercise - physical activity is linked to countless benefits.

Not only does exercising reduce the overall negative effects of depression, but it also works great against other mental health problems, such as anxiety and chronic stress. Furthermore, it lowers your cholesterol levels, boosts your immune system, and prevents illnesses, such as arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, etc.

Creating an exercise program, when you are struggling with depression, may seem impossible at first. However, once you start, you will notice the benefits very quickly.

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## Depression Immobilizes You

When depressed, everyday chores and small activities require an extra amount of effort, because even getting out of bed is a strenuous activity. This is not because depressed people are lazy – not at all.

As you already know, depression leads to demotivation; a feeling of worthlessness; negative beliefs towards oneself, the world, and others; hopelessness; lack of energy, etc. All of these symptoms can make it extremely difficult to engage in physical activity.

However, exercise may often counteract the negative effects of depression, and so it is one of the must-do steps one needs to take, in order to effectively cope with the disorder.

## **Exercise and Hormones**

Did you know that exercise can directly influence hormonal secretion? Physical activity triggers the release of so called 'happy hormones', such as serotonin, endorphins and dopamine. It also prevents the detrimental effects of stress hormones.

The hormones, released after just 20-30 minutes of light workout, or a few minutes into rigorous exercise, promote a healthy sleep-wake cycle, improve your alertness and concentration, and of course – make you instantly happier.

### **It Is Only Hard at First**

The first couple of days may be a bit harsh, but after a while, your body will adapt to the change and your motivation will increase, so you'll want to exercise.

What is more, exercise improves your self-perception and provides feeling of accomplishment and gratification. These are crucial for someone struggling with depression, since they can serve as the light, at the end of the tunnel.

## **The 10 000-Step Program**

Even small efforts, such as walking, or completing household chores, can have a positive effect on your overall health and wellbeing. The World Health Organization recommends that adults should take about of 10 000 steps per day, which is about 8 km or approximately 5 miles.

There are plenty of fitness applications for your phone, which can track your progress, by showing you the total number of steps, distance plus other relevant details about your daily physical activity.

### **Start Small**

Right now, it may seem as if engaging in so much physical activity would be impossible. However, plenty of people with a previously sedentary lifestyle have done it, and so can you.

Remember to start small and gradually work up to your 10 000 steps, or another goal. You can also make exercise fun, by striving to engage in physical activity you previously enjoyed, such as dancing.

Keep in mind that every step counts. Whether you're out shopping, or just spending a nice day in the park, as long as you keep walking, you are exercising.

## **The 30-Minute Workout**

In order to receive the full benefits of exercise, adults need at least 30-minutes of physical activity per day.

It doesn't have to be something painful, complicated or fancy. Keep it simple, by choosing light and fun options, such as riding a bike, doing squats and sit-ups at home, lightly jogging with your dog, etc.

Don't forget to take regular breaks and drink plenty of water. For instance, you can do 10 push-ups, followed by a 30 second break.

If you're a beginner, set the intervals according to your current physical condition. As your body slowly adapts to physical effort, you can gradually increase the amount of exercise per interval.

Last but not least, make sure you consult with your physician before starting a workout routine. A trainer at your local gym can also be of great help. He or she has probably worked with a lot of beginners, so there is no reason to feel self-conscious.

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