

# Exercise is as Effective as Antidepressants or Psychotherapy in Reducing Depression, Study Finds

*Researchers conclude exercise is effective in treating depression and should be offered as an evidence-based treatment option.*

WASHINGTON, DC, US, March 30, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The largest synthesis of data to date from research studies on the effect of exercise on depression [found](#) that exercise is as effective as antidepressant drugs or psychotherapy, the current first-line treatments for depression, and should be offered as an evidence-based treatment option. The study provides evidence for exercise as an alternative treatment for depressed individuals who do not want drugs or psychotherapy.



New research finds that exercise can substantially reduce depression symptoms, with the biggest results coming from moderate-intensity aerobic exercise done in a supervised or group setting.

Researchers from seven countries set out to address the problem of the mixed results from previous meta-analyses of studies on the effect of exercise on depression. Convincing evidence was needed to enable clinicians to prescribe exercise as an evidence-based treatment option. Using updated methodology to overcome the shortcomings of previous meta-analyses, researchers analyzed the results of 41 randomized controlled trials comprising 2,264 depressed adults and compared exercise with non-exercising control groups.

Their review, published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, showed exercise has a large effect in reducing depression symptoms. For every two depressed people treated with exercise, at least one would be expected to have a substantial reduction in depression symptoms, the researchers found.

This significant benefit was found regardless of the type or intensity of the exercise or whether

done in a group or not. Aerobic exercise was more effective than resistance training, but both delivered large benefits. Moderate intensity was more beneficial than light or vigorous intensity, but all reduced depression symptoms. Supervised and group exercise were found to deliver more positive effects than unsupervised and non-group.

“The findings from this review represent the most up-to-date and comprehensive meta-analysis of the available evidence and further supports the use of exercise focusing specifically on supervised and group exercise with moderate intensity and aerobic exercise regimes,” according to the study’s lead author, Andreas Heissel, PhD, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department for Sports and Health Sciences at the University of Potsdam, Germany.



Researchers say exercise is as effective as antidepressant drugs or psychotherapy, and should be offered as an evidence-based treatment option for depression as an alternative to drugs or psychotherapy.

The large positive effect on depression symptoms from exercise compares favorably with the results from two meta-analyses referenced in the study, one showing just a [moderate effect from psychotherapy](#) and the other showing only a [small effect from antidepressants](#), according to Heissel.

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*Andreas Heissel, PhD,  
University of Potsdam,  
Germany*

Exercise also avoids the side effects and withdrawal symptoms associated with antidepressants and the significant expense of psychotherapy.

“This is notable as the presented results suggest exercise [qualifies] as an efficacious treatment option for depressive symptoms among individuals with depression,” wrote Heissel.

The prescribing of antidepressants was questioned in another recent study, published in *Molecular Psychiatry* in

2022, that found no scientific evidence to support the theory that depression is caused by a

chemical imbalance of the brain, a common rationale for prescribing antidepressants. [1]

“The serotonin theory of depression has been one of the most influential and extensively researched biological theories of the origins of depression,” wrote lead researcher Joanna Moncrieff, a psychiatrist and professor at University College London. “Our study shows that this view is not supported by scientific evidence. It also calls into question the basis for the use of antidepressants.”

WARNING: Anyone wishing to discontinue or change the dose of a psychiatric drug is cautioned to do so only under the supervision of a physician because of potentially dangerous withdrawal symptoms.



The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) continues to raise public awareness of the risks of serious side effects and withdrawal symptoms from antidepressants and other psychiatric drugs, so that consumers and their physicians can make fully informed decisions about starting or stopping the drugs. CCHR supports safe and science-based non-drug approaches to mental health.

CCHR recommends a complete physical examination with lab tests, nutritional and allergy screenings, and a review of all current medications to identify any physical causes of depression or other unwanted mental and emotional symptoms, which might otherwise be misdiagnosed as a psychiatric disorder and incorrectly treated.

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights was co-founded in 1969 by members of the Church of Scientology and the late psychiatrist and humanitarian Thomas Szasz, M.D., recognized by many academics as modern psychiatry's most authoritative critic, to eradicate abuses and restore human rights and dignity to the field of mental health. CCHR has been instrumental in obtaining 228 laws against psychiatric abuses and violations of human rights worldwide.

The CCHR National Affairs Office in Washington, DC, has advocated for mental health rights and protections at the state and federal level. The CCHR traveling exhibit, which has toured 441 major cities worldwide and educated over 800,000 people on the history to the present day of abusive and racist psychiatric practices, has been displayed at the Congressional Black Caucus

Foundation Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, and at other locations.

[1] <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41380-022-01661-0.pdf>

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