



FACT SHEET

THE FACTS ABOUT EXERCISE

EXERCISING WELL

- Sedentary behaviour is associated with poorer mental health and evidence suggests that increased levels of exercise can positively impact on mood and general wellbeing.

AUSTRALIA'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (13–17 YEAR OLDS)

Being active is important for everyone. Keeping physically active and limiting sedentary behaviour is not always a priority for young people, but it is important. These guidelines are for all young people, irrespective of cultural background, gender or ability.

Physical activity guidelines

- For health benefits young people aged 13–17 years should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.
- Young peoples' physical activity should include a variety of aerobic activities, including some high intensity activity.
- On at least three days per week young people should engage in activities that strengthen muscle and bone.
- To achieve additional health benefits young people should engage in more activity – up to several hours per day.

Sedentary behaviour guidelines

- To reduce health risks, young people aged 13–17 years should minimise the time they spend being sedentary every day.
- Limit use of electronic media for entertainment (e.g. television, seated electronic games and computer use) to no more than two hours a day – lower levels are associated with reduced health risks.
- Break up long periods of sitting as often as possible.

EXERCISE AND THE BRAIN

Research suggests that regular exercise may increase the level of brain serotonin, a neurotransmitter involved in regulating mood, sleep, libido, appetite and other functions.

Exercise can also increase the level of endorphins in the brain which have 'mood-lifting' properties.



REGULAR EXERCISE MAY ALLEVIATE SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION BY:

- Increasing energy levels
- Improving sleep
- Distracting from worries and rumination
- Providing social support and reducing loneliness if exercise is done with other people
- Increasing a sense of control and self-esteem, by allowing people to take an active role in their own wellbeing

M T W T H F

THE EVIDENCE

- Numerous studies have shown that people who exercise regularly experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety than those who do not exercise regularly.
- Several trials have shown that regular exercise of moderate intensity can be an effective adjunctive treatment by itself for both melancholic and non-melancholic depression.
- Two trials have found that 16 weeks of regular exercise is equally effective as antidepressant medication in the treatment of mild to moderate depression.
- Research also suggests that exercise can further assist individuals with depression who have only partially responded to an antidepressant medication.
- Both aerobic exercise (e.g. brisk walking, cycling or jogging) and resistance or strength training (e.g. weight-lifting) have been found to be helpful in treating depression.
- Exercise interventions for children and young people show positive short-term effects on self-esteem.



The *make your move – Sit less – Be active for life!* brochure (PDF 401 KB) | HTML presents the guidelines and provides further information and advice about physical activity and sedentary behaviour (sitting) for young people.

This fact sheet has been adapted from the following sources:

- *Physical Activity Guidelines for Young People Aged 13–17*, health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#apa1317
- *Exercise and Depression Fact Sheet*, The Black Dog Institute, blackdoginstitute.org.au
- Parker et al, *The effectiveness of simple psychological and exercise interventions for high prevalence mental health problems in young people: a factorial randomised controlled trial*. *Trials* 2011, 12:76