

5 WAYS EXERCISE FIGHTS FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

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Whether or not you meet criteria for a clinical diagnosis of depression or anxiety, we've all felt down or anxious at certain times in our lives. These are normal human emotions in the face of stress or adversity. However, when these emotions become so frequent or overwhelming that they start to interfere with our day-to-day lives, they can become problematic. The psychological impact of exercise has been well studied, and we know that regular activity can stabilize our mood well as reduce fatigue and stress, and improve alertness, concentration, and overall cognitive function.

If you've ever exercised before, I'm sure you can relate. Remember a time you were feeling terribly overwhelmed, stressed, or down and then just minutes after finishing your workout life didn't seem quite so daunting anymore? Maybe you experienced a newfound sense of mental clarity and were ready to tackle the most challenging project on your to-do list. This is the incredible power of exercise. It works as a quick fix, and regular activity can also help to prevent feelings of depression and anxiety from popping up in the first place.

Even for those with clinical depression or anxiety, exercise has been found to be a successful first-line or adjunct treatment. Several studies have found exercise to be similarly effective as cognitive therapy and the most commonly used medications for depression and anxiety called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). While exercise alone may not be sufficient for individuals with severe symptoms, it can certainly still help in combination with other treatments.

Exercise is a recommended treatment modality for both anxiety and depression by organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association.

So, why is exercise so great at helping us to regulate our mood and emotions? Below are 5 powerful ways that exercise fights feelings of depression and anxiety:

1. Exercise produces endorphins. Endorphins are chemicals released in the body in response to exercise. They interact with certain pain receptors in the brain resulting in decreased pain perception and often a feeling of euphoria.
2. Exercise requires focus. Often, exercise requires so much of our attention that it distracts us from our worries. In this way, exercise can be a form of mindfulness or present-moment awareness, a practice which has also been shown to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. The more intense or complex the exercise, the more we are forced to be "in the moment" rather than allowing our minds to wander.
3. Exercise can drive connection. Exercise can be done alone, but it can also provide a great opportunity to connect with other people. Whether you go for a walk with a friend or join a group workout class, sweating and being vulnerable with others can help to forge authentic human connections that themselves are protective against depression and anxiety.
4. Exercise helps us build confidence and self-esteem. Making the effort to do something we know is good for ourselves (like exercise!) can help us to build confidence and our sense of self-worth. Taking this one step further, putting in regular, dedicated effort to learn a new skill or improve our athletic performance (i.e. going from running a 10-minute to 9-minute mile) can be a huge confidence-booster!
5. Exercise can improve sleep. Exercise is also known to improve sleep quality, which is often disturbed in individuals who struggle with anxiety

or depression. When we use our bodies during the day, they are better at recovering at night and our minds will thank us, too!

Despite knowing all of the amazing benefits of exercise, it can still be difficult to find the motivation to get started, especially when battling feelings of depression or anxiety. I love the saying, "action before motivation" because oftentimes that motivation doesn't start to build until after you've started to exercise. The key is finding a way to get yourself started in a regular routine - whether it's finding an accountability buddy, a reward system, or a routine such as going to the gym right after work. Once you're a few minutes into your workout, I think you'll surprise yourself by the motivation that starts to build. So, next time you start to feel stressed or down in the dumps, grab a friend, get moving, and say goodbye to your feelings of anxiety and depression!

References

Herring MP, O'Connor PJ, Dishman RK. The effect of exercise training on anxiety symptoms among patients: a systematic review. *Arch Intern Med.* 2010 Feb 22;170(4):321-31.

Schuch FB, Vancampfort D, Richards J, Rosenbaum S, Ward PB, Stubbs B. Exercise as a treatment for depression: A meta-analysis adjusting for publication bias. *J Psychiatr Res.* 2016 Jun;77:42-51.

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WORKOUT OF THE MONTH

Here's a fun workout you can try with a partner, or on your own!

For Time:

10 Rounds, alternating partners each round:

5 Push Ups*

10 Situps**

15 Burpees

If you don't have a partner, complete 5 rounds for time.

*Substitute kneeling push ups or wall push ups if needed

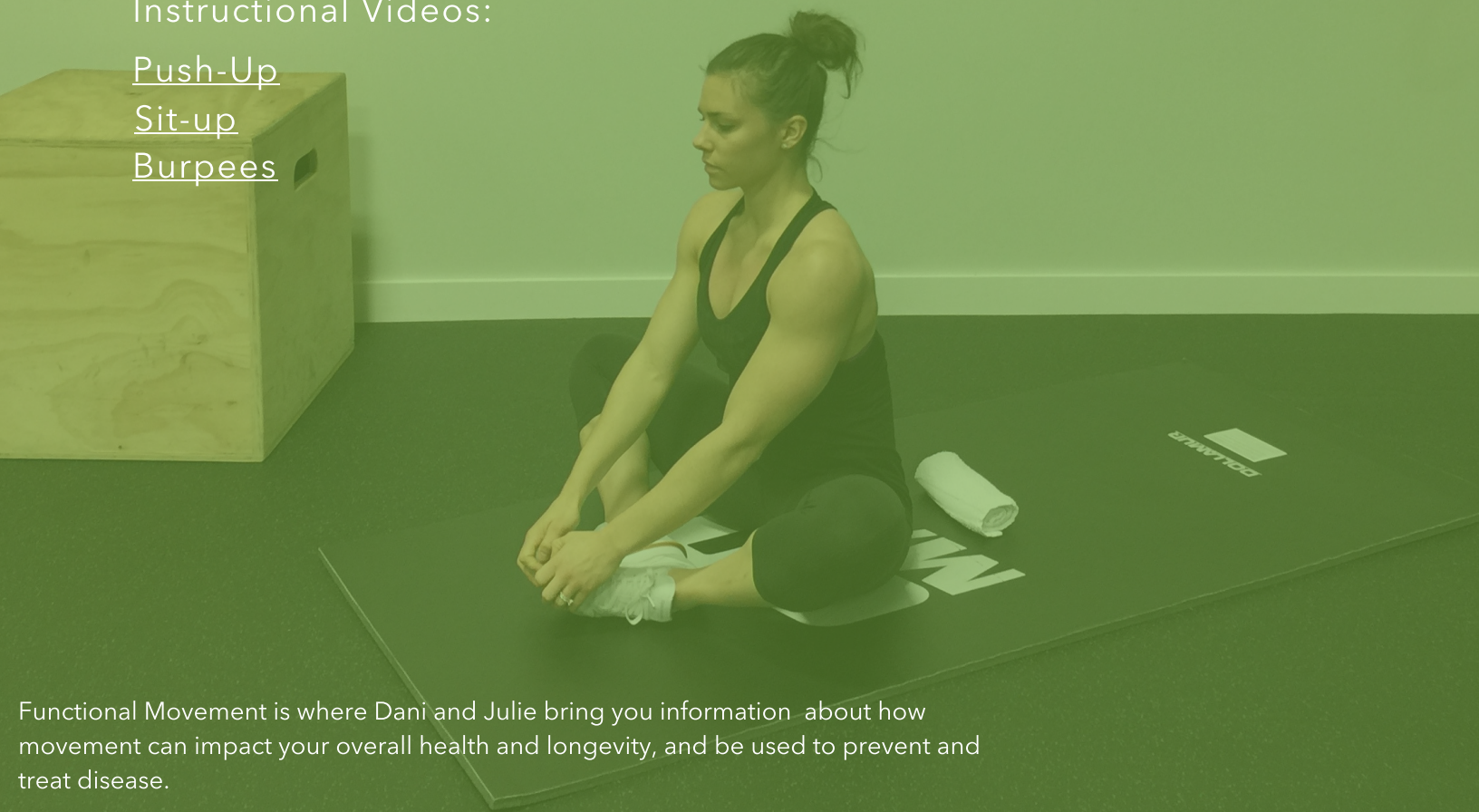
**Substitute crunches if needed

Instructional Videos:

[Push-Up](#)

[Sit-up](#)

[Burpees](#)



Functional Movement is where Dani and Julie bring you information about how movement can impact your overall health and longevity, and be used to prevent and treat disease.