

[IMAGE]

Beat the Blues (Without Drugs)

By Editorial Staff

Depression affects approximately 18.8 million American adults (about 9.5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older) in a given year. With "black box" warnings and dangerous side effects of commonly prescribed antidepressant drugs, why not try natural alternatives? According to a number of recent studies, exercise can be as effective in treating depression as drug therapy.

In the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, researchers report that 30-minute aerobic workouts of moderate intensity, performed three to five times per week, cut mild to moderate depression symptoms nearly in half. Researchers noted remission rates of 42 percent for those on antidepressant medications and 36 percent for those receiving cognitive behavior therapy. Low-intensity exercise cut depression symptoms by 30 percent compared to 29 percent for stretching/flexibility exercises alone. The ability to reduce depression through physical activity related to the intensity of the exercise and sustaining it for 30-35 minutes per day.

Another study, published in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, included 202 men and women age 40 and older who were diagnosed with major depression. They were broken into four groups: One worked out in a supervised, group setting three times per week; one exercised at home; one took Zoloft; and one took placebo pills. After 16 weeks, 47 percent of patients on the antidepressant, 45 percent of those in the supervised exercise group, 40 percent of those in the home-based exercise group and 31 percent of the placebo group no longer met the criteria for major depression.

Researchers believe exercise enhances mood by releasing norepinephrine and serotonin - the same nervous-system chemicals targeted by antidepressant drugs. Exercise also boosts feelings of self-efficacy and promotes positive thinking. If life's got you down, try 30 minutes of moderate exercise to help you fight depression the all-natural way.

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