



According to the World Health Organization “Depression” is a common mental disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy and poor concentration. It is among the leading causes of disability worldwide. People who have suffered from depression will tell you that the effects are overwhelming and can be crippling. It takes over your body, your emotions, and your mind. The good news is that depression is treatable with medication, therapy and some self-help options. One of the best ways you can help deal with your depression is to exercise. Research has shown that exercise:

- Effects the same neurotransmitters as antidepressants
- Helps to release endorphins, the “feel good” brain chemical
- Helps relieve muscle tension
- Helps to reduce cortisol levels, reducing feelings of anxiety
- Raises body temperature which seems to produce a calming effect

In addition to physiological effects, exercise can provide some powerful psychological benefits:

- Helps increase self-esteem
- Helps rebuild a sense of mastery and self-confidence
- Provides a distraction, compels you to focus on a positive, not a negative
- Helps you to reconnect with the “healthy” part of you

The problem is that exercise may be the last thing that a depressed person wishes to do. Part of depression is a “mental battle” to overcome the negativity and physical inertia that are a big part of the disease. Exercise may seem like an impossibility when it is a struggle just to get out of bed, but you must decide whose side you are on, yours or the disease. Then, just do it! Give yourself a chance to see if exercise can help you.

Set simple goals. You do not have to train for a triathlon, start by walking around the block. Tomorrow do more, try to improve a little each day. Research shows that just thirty minutes of daily exercise can help relieve symptoms of depression. If you cannot handle thirty minutes of exercise, feel good about what you are able to do. Do not become trapped in a web of negativity. Find activities that you enjoy (or enjoyed) when you were not depressed. It could be as simple as playing with a pet or working in your garden. Let exercise become a highlight of your day and not something else that you “should do.” Find a friend to exercise with, talking with someone will help raise your energy level and reduce feelings of isolation. Get outside, breathe some fresh air and participate in the world as much as you can handle. Talk with your doctor about your plans to exercise; perhaps he/she might be able to refer you to someone who would help you set up an exercise program. Finding an exercise professional to help set up a program for you will help give you a good start and keep you motivated.

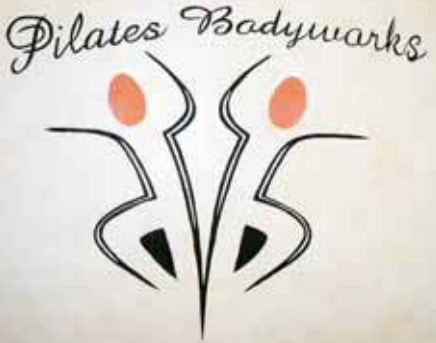
Most important: do not give up! Depression is a powerful opponent; be sure that you know your adversary and its weaknesses. Use that information to help you fight back. You may have to do what you know is right for yourself now and wait for the positive feelings to come later. Start small, be proud and feel good about your accomplishments.

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## Fight the Bad Feelings

By Miriam Richter



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