Exercise and Mental Health  by David Snebold

Exercise and mental health are linked together in a multitude of different ways. Aerobic exercise routines including cycling, jogging, and even gardening have been proven to reduce depression and anxiety. According to Sharma and the National Library of Medicine, “These improvements in mood are proposed to be caused by exercise-induced increase in blood circulation to the brain ... Exercise has also been found to alleviate symptoms such as low self-esteem and social withdrawal. Exercise is especially important in patients with schizophrenia...because of the additional risk of weight gain associated with antipsychotic treatment.” It is also worth noting that in terms of aerobic exercise when it pertains to walking that, “Moreover, these 30 minutes need not to be continuous; three 10-minute walks are believed to be as equally useful as one 30-minute walk.” (Sharma)

In experimental studies, Blumenthal has investigated the mood-exercise connection in a collection of randomized trials. In one study, his colleagues and he labeled sedentary adults with major depressive disorder to one of four different factions: home-based exercise, supervised exercise, antidepressant therapy or a placebo pill. After several months of treatment, “Blumenthal found, patients in the exercise and antidepressant groups had higher rates of remission than did the patients on the placebo. Exercise, he concluded, was generally comparable to antidepressants for patients with major depressive disorder” (Weir)

“Some researchers suspect exercise alleviates chronic depression by increasing serotonin (the neurotransmitter targeted by antidepressants) or brain-derived neurotrophic factor (which supports the growth of neurons). Another theory suggests exercise helps by normalizing sleep, which is known to have protective effects on the brain.” (Weir)

As you can see, there are a great many connections between exercise and mental health. It is worth noting that exercise can alleviate depression, anxiety, and types of mood disorders. The research into these aspects of mental health are still in their infancy, so exercise should not be looked at as the golden solution to all your problems. However, exercise along with a medication regimen can help in a tremendous fashion.

References
