

Movement Is Mental

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Movement is mental! Initially, I was going to write how movement is medicine and that this is such an intricate part of physical therapy. I love the “movement is medicine” quote and use this daily in my practice of physical therapy. I believe that the mental side of physical therapy is an underappreciated side of physical therapy. Physical therapy sometimes is as much mental as physical. The brain is the generator of all movement and it is no secret that if you believe that you are going to get better, then you probably are going to get better. Exercise improves mental health by reducing anxiety, decreasing depression and negative moods, and improving self-esteem and cognitive function. Exercise also has been found to alleviate symptoms such as social withdrawal. Movement through physical activity helps us feel better, function better, sleep better, and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases. Health benefits start immediately after we begin regularly moving, and even short episodes of physical activity are beneficial.

These are all great benefits, but one of the most frequent questions that I get as a physical therapist is where and how do I start an exercise program. The answer is somewhat easy — just start moving. Start slow, and the biggest piece is to be consistent! It has been proven that 30 minutes of exercise a day can provide numerous benefits to include mood boost, reduce stress, reduce anxiety, and improve memory. If you don't have time for 30 minutes of exercise, or if your body tells you to take a break after 5 or 10 minutes, for example, that's OK too. The more you exercise, the more energy you'll have, so eventually you'll feel ready for a little more. The key is to commit to some moderate physical activity most days of the week.

Consistency is the cornerstone to any good exercise program. You want results? Repetition is the easiest way to start seeing results. Exercising regularly is one of the easiest and most effective ways to improve concentration, motivation, memory, and mood. Again, no surprises here, the easiest way to be consistent is to do two simple things. First, find days and times that work for you. In an ideal world that would be the same day and time every day, but it may have to change with your schedule. Write down your schedule and stick to it. The next best way to be consistent is to have a workout partner. It can be anyone, and in this day and age, it even could be someone on a phone or computer in another area. Just doing those two little things will tremendously help with the compliance of your exercise program.

Which is better, strength training or aerobic training? There are benefits to both with the difference being more physically oriented than mentally. Research has seen that reducing stress and decreasing anxiety can be done with both strength and aerobic training. So, I think the easiest answer is a combination of both strength and aerobic training.

Let's keep it simple, then, and say one of the best ways to "strengthen" your mental health is to move. A few take-home points are listed below.

- Start slow!
- Exercise for 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Exercise can be broken up to equal 30 minutes in a day.
- Both aerobic and strength training help mental health.
- Be consistent. Find a friend.