EXERCISE LIFTS MOOD

There is a substantial body of evidence to show a causal link between physical activity and reduced clinically defined depression (1) and comparative studies have demonstrated that exercise can be as effective as medication or psychotherapy (2).

Exercise has been associated with reduced anxiety, decreased depression, enhanced mood, improved self-worth and body image, as well as improved cognitive functioning (3). According to the National Institute For Clinical Excellence: "For patients with depression, in particular those with mild to moderate depressive disorder, structured and supervised exercise can be an effective intervention that has a clinically significant impact on depressive symptoms." (4)

In view of this there are several reasons for using structured daily exercise as a self help strategy for improving mood:

Exercise has far fewer negative side effects than anti-depressants. Indeed it has a number of co-incidental benefits, including reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and obesity (5). It is an intervention, which has only one potential outcome – improved health, better mood.

Exercise is a sustainable behaviour change. In other words, once the exercise habit is learned, it can be integrated to form part of an overall healthy lifestyle.

Exercise does not carry the stigma of other treatments/interventions.

In one survey, 85% of people with mental health problems who used exercise as a treatment said they found it helpful (6).

Exercise was found to give those who suffer depression, a sense of power over their recovery, which in itself counteracts the feelings of hopelessness often experienced in depression. (7)

The overwhelming majority of studies carried out have shown a positive benefit for those with depression that engage in formal exercise therapy (8). Both the Chief Medical Officer in the UK and the National Institute For Clinical Excellence have acknowledged the results of these studies in their publications, and the 2004 British Government White Paper- Choosing Health, states that: "Regular physical activity reduces the risk of depression and has positive benefits for mental health, including reduced anxiety, enhanced mood and self-esteem." (9)

REFERENCES

1. Biddle S., Fox K., Boucher S., Faulkner G. (2000) The Way Forward For Physical Activity And The Promotion of Psychological Well-Being London:Rutledge p155

2. Dept. of Health (UK, 2004) At least Five a Week: Evidence on the Impact of Physical Activity And Its Relationship To Health, London: Dept of Health p58

3. Biddle S., Fox K., Boucher S., Faulkner G. (2000) The Way Forward For Physical Activity And The Promotion of Psychological Well-Being London: Rutledge p154-158

4. National Institute For Clinical Excellence (2003) Depression, NICE guidelines, Second Consultation London NHS p13

5. Dept. of Health (UK, 2004) At least Five a Week: Evidence on the Impact of Physical Activity And Its Relationship To Health, London: Dept of Health p58

6. National Schizophrenia Fellowship, Mond, Manic Depression Fellowship (2000) A Question of Choice London: NSF/MIND/MDF p30

7. Exercise was found to give those who suffer depression, a sense of power over their recovery, which in itself counteracts the feelings of hopelessness often experienced in depression.

8. Mental Health Foundation (2005) Up and Running? Exercise Therapy and The Treatment of Mild Or Moderate Depression in Primary Care- London: Mental Health Foundation p18

9. Craft L., Perna F. (2004) The Benefits of Exercise For The Clinically Depressed Primary Care Companion to The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry Vol 6 pp104-111

10. Dept of Health UK (2004) Choosing Health: Making Healthier Choices Easier- London Dept of Health p132

EXERCISE HELPS BECAUSE…….

Exercise is believed to increase the release of the brain chemicals that affect our mood and make us feel happier. (i.e. release of endorphins and enkephalins)

Exercise can help us to get active and meet people. This stops us from feeling isolated and unsupported.

Exercise can give us new goals and a sense of purpose. We feel we have something positive to focus on and aim for.

Exercise can boost our self-esteem – it can improve the way we look and how we feel about ourselves.

Exercise can distract us from preoccupation with negative thoughts.