

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH



An increasing number of research studies have revealed the positive relationship between mental health and aerobic fitness training. Not many people are familiar with this relationship.

Regrettably the medical industry has still not come around to the idea that the mind (head) and the other parts of the body are intimately connected. It's a crying shame that physical activity is rarely prescribed (in a scientific dosage), measured, managed and monitored by doctors. In particular it's people suffering from depression who are short changed. 'Fitness' continues to be the word that dare not speak its name in surgeries throughout the world.

Holism versus dualism

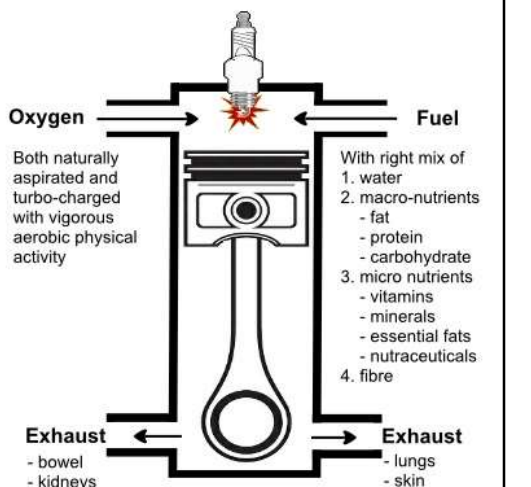
Holism For all intents and purposes what the research findings indicate is that the body's metabolic, musculo-skeletal and mental health systems work together as a whole. No part is an island. All parts work together, for good or ill. What happens in one part may affect what happens in other parts. Whether you've got a stomach ache, a head ache, lower back pain or your stressed out of our brain with the worry that accompanies a relationship breakdown will affect the results you give yourself when asked, 'How are you going'.

Dualism denies this fact. In particular it treats the mind as a quite separate part of the body, divorced from the other parts.

If the head/mind was inside the torso instead of sitting on top of the shoulders, we'd have a completely different view of mental health. We'd recognise its close association with metabolic health.

Metabolic Health

We're in an era when there is an epidemic of personally-generated metabolic dysfunction.

<p>The cause? a metabolic health engine that's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. not delivering enough oxygen to every cell in the bodyb. not delivering the right amount of high-quality fuel to every cell in the body,c. failing to successfully remove the waste products of cellular metabolism. <p>Every part of the body is affected, even the most minute parts.</p> <p>There is an intimate connection between metabolic health and mental health.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE METABOLIC ENGINE - responsible for optimal cell function -</p>  <p>The diagram illustrates a metabolic engine with a piston and spark plug. On the left, an arrow labeled 'Oxygen' points into the engine. On the right, an arrow labeled 'Fuel' points into the engine. Below the engine, two arrows labeled 'Exhaust' point outwards. The left exhaust arrow is associated with 'bowel' and 'kidneys', and the right exhaust arrow is associated with 'lungs' and 'skin'.</p> <p>Both naturally aspirated and turbo-charged with vigorous aerobic physical activity</p> <p>With right mix of</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. water2. macro-nutrients<ul style="list-style-type: none">- fat- protein- carbohydrate3. micro nutrients<ul style="list-style-type: none">- vitamins- minerals- essential fats- nutraceuticals4. fibre <p>Oxygen → ← Fuel</p> <p>Exhaust ← → Exhaust</p> <p>- bowel - lungs - kidneys - skin</p>
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Poor metabolic health is recognised by its symptoms.

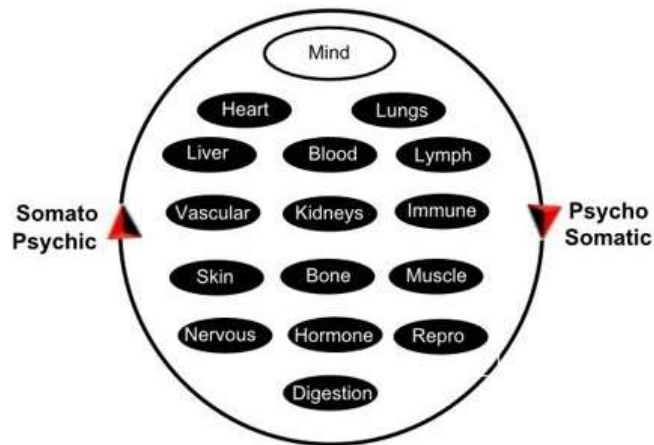
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cardiac insufficiency ▪ breathlessness • obesity • high blood pressure • depression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • type 2 diabetes • elevated blood fats • insomnia • snoring ▪ sleep apnoea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • headaches • tired ▪ lacking energy • low libido • irritable bowel ...
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THE PSYCH-SOMATIC / SOMATO-PSYCHIC ECOSYSTEM

What happens in the mind effects the rest of the body – that’s the psycho-somatic response. The simplest example of that is when you’re about to give a speech you get sweaty palms or your hands shake.

What happens in the rest of the body affects the mind - that’s the somato psychic response.

Aerobic physical activity has a positive affect on all parts of the metabolic health system. The mind is a part of the metabolic health system.



THE STUDIES

1. Exercise more effective than medicines to manage mental health

In a report published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, researchers at the University of South Australia are calling for exercise to be a mainstay approach for managing depression as a new study shows that physical activity is 1.5 times more effective than counselling or the leading medications.

‘People with the lowest combined aerobic and muscular fitness had 98% higher odds of depression, 60% higher odds of anxiety, and 81% higher odds of having either one of the common mental health disorders, compared to those with high levels of overall fitness.’



The research underscores the need for physical activity, particularly structured exercise interventions, to be a mainstay approach for managing depression and anxiety.’ Ref: <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/57/18/1203>

Published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, the review is the most comprehensive to date, encompassing 97 reviews, 1039 trials and 128,119 participants. It shows that physical activity is extremely beneficial for improving symptoms of depression, anxiety, and distress.

The review showed that exercise interventions that were 12 weeks or shorter were the most effective at reducing mental health symptoms, highlighting the speed at which physical activity can make a change.

The largest benefits were seen among people with depression, pregnant and postpartum women, healthy individuals, and people diagnosed with HIV or kidney disease.

Lead UniSA researcher, Dr Ben Singh, says,

'Physical activity must be prioritised to better manage the growing cases of mental health conditions. 'Physical activity is known to help improve mental health. Yet despite the evidence, it has not been widely adopted as a first-choice treatment.'

Higher intensity exercise had greater improvements for depression and anxiety, while longer durations had smaller effects when compared to short and mid-duration bursts.

All types of physical activity and exercise were beneficial, including aerobic exercise such as walking, resistance training, Pilates, and yoga.

Importantly, the research shows that it doesn't take much for exercise to make a positive change to your mental health.

'Examining these studies as a whole is an effective way for clinicians to easily understand the body of evidence that supports physical activity in managing mental health disorders.'

2. Exercise as medicine for depressive symptoms?

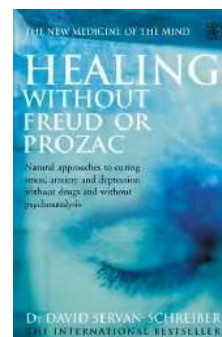
The Sport and Health Sciences, Social and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Potsdam, Germany conducted a systemic review to estimate the efficacy of exercise on depressive symptoms compared with non-active control groups and to determine the moderating effects of exercise on depression.



The conclusion was that 'exercise is efficacious in treating depression and depressive symptoms and should be offered as an evidence-based treatment option focusing on supervised and group exercise with moderate intensity and aerobic exercise regimes.'

3. Healing Without Freud or Prozac

In the book *'Healing without Freud or Prozac'* psychiatrist, (the late) David Servan-Schreiber outlines the case for aerobic exercise. He reports a study from researchers at Duke University who compared the anti-depressant effects of jogging with those of Zoloft.



'After four months patients treated with either approach were doing well. On the other hand, a year later, there was a major difference between the two types of treatment. More than a third of the patients who had been treated with Zoloft had relapsed, whereas 92 percent of those who had followed the jogging programme were still doing well.'

THE HEALTH CLIMATE SURVEY

[Click here](#) to register and then login to take the Health Climate Survey. Your results will provide you with a good idea of your metabolic, musculo-skeletal and mental health - and what you can do to improve it.

John Miller