



Exercise Handout 4:

Exercising to beat depression: Overcoming obstacles


See also [Fact Sheet: Exercise and depression](#)

Regular exercise can be an effective way to reduce symptoms of depression.

However, most people find that there are things that make it more difficult to exercise at times. Symptoms of depression (e.g. tiredness) can make it harder to get started.

It can be very helpful to anticipate the things that you expect to make it more difficult for you to exercise, and to write a plan to address each of these. Write down below the “barriers” that might prevent you from exercising, and some possible solutions for each one.

Ideas for solutions are listed in the table “Common barriers to exercise and possible solutions”.

MY EXPECTED BARRIERS AND WAYS TO DEAL WITH THEM	
	
Barrier	Solutions

COMMON BARRIERS TO EXERCISE AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS[†]



Barrier	Possible Solutions
I don't have enough time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even short bouts of exercise (10 minutes) can be helpful. • Try exercising at lunch time, parking further away and walking or going for a 10-15 minute brisk walk in the morning. • Most people spend a couple of hours a day watching TV. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try substituting some TV time for exercising twice a week.
I don't feel like it (I'm just not motivated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link up with a friend – you can help and encourage each other. • Don't wait until you really <i>feel</i> like it – start small, set yourself realistic goals each week and reward yourself for your efforts. • Read over the benefits of exercise important to you.
I'm too tired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try being active at times when you have the most energy. • Start small. Even if it means going for a 5 minute walk – once you get started you may feel like walking for longer. • Remind yourself that regular exercise can increase your energy.
I'm not sporty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You don't have to join a gym or play sports to be active. • Brisk walking can be helpful. • Make everyday activities a way to be active (e.g. housework, taking the stairs, playing with the kids in a park).
I won't enjoy it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no need to exhaust yourself – start gradually with brisk walks. • Remind yourself that although activities might not be as enjoyable as usual, this can improve with time. Regular exercise can gradually reduce symptoms of depression. • Try different activities – including some outdoors in the sunlight and in pleasant settings (e.g. in parks).
I hate gyms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try different types of exercise that do not involve gyms (e.g. walking, yoga or cycling outdoors). • Work together with your doctor or psychologist to choose types of exercise that you will be prepared to try.
I have physical limitations (e.g. unfit, elderly, overweight, chronic pain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to your doctor about exercising in a way that is best for you. Your GP may refer you to an exercise physiologist, who can assist in developing an exercise program tailored to your needs. • Simply walking can be very helpful. • Water based exercise puts less strain on bones and joints.
I have too many family obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your partner, family members or friends about your reasons for exercising, and ask them to assist you (e.g. by babysitting). • Recognise that taking time to care for yourself, including being active, is essential for your health and will help you fulfill your roles.
I'll be too embarrassed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You don't have to join a gym – try walking in a park • Remember that most people are thinking about themselves and not how you look – focus on doing something good for yourself.

[†] Adapted from Smith BJ et al (2008). Encouraging physical activity: Five steps for GPs. *Australian Family Physician*, 37(1/2):24-28.