Aerobic Exercise Has Antidepressant Treatment Effects

An analysis of randomized controlled clinical trials indicates that supervised aerobic exercise has large antidepressant treatment effects for patients with major depression. The systematic review and meta-analysis is published in Depression and Anxiety.

Across 11 eligible trials involving 455 adult patients (18-65 years old) with major depression as a primary disorder, supervised aerobic exercise was performed on average for 45 minutes, at moderate intensity, 3 times per week, and for 9.2 weeks. It showed a significantly large overall antidepressant effect compared with antidepressant medication and/or psychological therapies.

Also, aerobic exercise revealed moderate-to-large antidepressant effects among trials with lower risk of bias, as well as large antidepressant effects among trials with short-term interventions (up to 4 weeks) and trials involving preferences for exercise.

Subgroup analyses revealed comparable effects for aerobic exercise across various settings and delivery formats, and in both outpatients and inpatients regardless of symptom severity.

“Collectively, this study has found that supervised aerobic exercise can significantly support major depression treatment in mental health services,” said lead author Dr. Ioannis D. Morres, of the University of Thessaly, in Greece.

Additional Information


About Journal

Depression and Anxiety, the official journal of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), welcomes original research and synthetic review articles covering neurobiology (genetics and neuroimaging), epidemiology, experimental psychopathology, and treatment (psychotherapeutic and pharmacologic) aspects of mood and anxiety disorders and related phenomena in humans. The journal publishes only two types of articles: original Research Papers and Reviews. A priority is placed on treatment and review papers, and on papers with information and findings that will enhance the clinical evaluation and care of individuals struggling with the effects of these disorders.

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