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# HEALTH & FITNESS

S P O R T S M A G A Z I N E®

## Beat the **BLUES**

### IN THE GYM

Boost your mood with the natural pick-me-up of exercise



When you're feeling down, stressed out or find yourself stuck in a slump, it may seem like there's nothing that can pick you up and turn things around. But sometimes, all it usually takes is a trip to the gym to help put the blues behind you.



Statistics report that there are more than 21 million American children and adults being treated for depression annually. While the most common treatment is medication, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that exercise such as cardio, weight training and/or exertive training like fitness kickboxing, will increase serotonin and endorphin levels to help boost one's mood and cognitive functioning.

In fact, according to professionals with Mental Health America (MHA) of Greater Houston, physical activity offers many mental wellness benefits, including improved symptoms of stress and other health issues when integrated into a treatment plan.

"A visit to the gym is more than a physical workout, it's a good way to get your mind and body into shape and a great place to socialize and meet new people," said Traci Patterson, director of communications at MHA of Greater Houston. "It improves your mood, makes you more resilient to stress, and improves certain symptoms of common mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression."

Studies show that exercising for at least 30 minutes a day for three to five days a week can significantly improve depression symptoms. As little as 10 to 15 minutes of exercise a day can decrease feelings of stress and improve mood in the short term.

Not only is exercise a healthy coping strategy, but it also builds confidence, self-worth and shifts the focus away from unpleasant thoughts. Even your favorite workout tunes can help pump you up and get you moving.

Years ago, Houston personal trainer Jason Roy experienced a personal bout with depression following the death of a loved one, but thanks to a close friend who insisted on getting him off the couch and walking outdoors for some exercise, he found that staying active pulled him out of depression and helped him work through his emotions.

"At first I was annoyed at my friend's persistence, so I finally gave it a shot," Roy said. "That eventually led to throwing the baseball around some. Soon, I had this steam engine of desire to get out my hard, deep

emotions through training. In no time, I was running multiple times a week and began cycling. I would push so hard in my fitness that to this day, I don't know how I survived some of the training regimens I put myself through."

Roy admits that finding the motivation to start exercising during this dark time was difficult, but it also became his saving grace. It's part of what inspired him to complete his nutrition degree and become a fitness professional and gym owner.

"Understandably, when we are feeling 'blue' or depressed, the last thing that we want to do is exercise," Roy said. "This is where a friend or family member can be of great help to us. Schedule a time when you can get to the park for a walk, go to a water fitness class at your gym or hire a qualified trainer to push you and help you. It takes baby steps."

Based on his own experience working with clients, trainer Bob Talamini recommends aerobic exercise to deal with negative feelings. Generally, he suggests individuals should avoid higher intensities (more than 90% MHR), as they can increase irritability. Rather, Talamini said, low to moderate intensities (70% MHR) are ideal and have a more positive effect on the mental state.

The key to beating the blues, Talamini said, is to set small, progressive goals and join a group class or sports team for the social aspect.

"I've seen many clients who are working through a tough time or depression stage," he said. "These clients require a little more encouragement and positive reinforcement, so we work on achieving small goals to help with self-esteem and positive thought process. I really try and force the person out of the house and into the mainstream to help with the isolation and concurrent negative thoughts that can come with a depressed state. The exercise almost always increases mood, decreases anxiety and helps them have a better day."

And that's exactly what exercising should do – kick the stress, beat the blues and keep you smiling.



**Traci Patterson** is the director of communications for Mental Health America of Greater Houston ([Mhahouston.org](http://Mhahouston.org)), which offers information and referrals to low-cost or free counseling services for individuals and families in the Houston area. For more information, call 713.522.5161.

**Jason Roy** owns Spring Valley Wellness at I-10 and Campbell Road. You can reach him through his website at [Svwellness.com](http://Svwellness.com).

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