

# HEALTHY LIFE, HEALTHY MIND

FOR A HEALTHIER STATE-OF-MIND, DITCH THE JUNK FOOD AND GET OFF THE COUCH. YOU'LL BE SURPRISED AT HOW MUCH BETTER YOU'LL FEEL.

**R**egular activity, even something simple such as going for a walk, is not only good for your heart but also for your mind. Research suggests that exercise not only releases endorphins (the feel-good chemicals in the brain that make us feel relaxed and happy), but can also be beneficial to people with depression as it gives structure and purpose to the day. In addition, exercising outdoors provides an added bonus of exposure to sunlight, which stimulates the pineal gland (associated with mood boosting).

Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne's Mental Health Research Institute, Neil Cole, is an advocate of the importance of exercise on mental health. Neil has lived with bi-polar mood disorder since adolescence, although he did go undiagnosed for 17 years.

Eight years ago, Neil met runner Bob Smith, and this is when he started exercising regularly, including running. 'I started off running 200m at a time and eventually built up to a kilometre. Now I run 10km fun runs,' he says.

More and more, lifestyle factors including exercise are seen as a first-line treatment for people suffering from depression. In fact, mental health professionals are more commonly recognising running, specifically, as a way to treat mild depression and it is said to be just as effective as pharmaceuticals.

'I felt down on Monday and couldn't

get out of it, so I went for a run, and it was all gone,' agrees Neil.

A study in the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* also suggests that regular yoga-type activities can directly improve mood, reduce anxiety and lessen depression in psychiatric patients.

Low mood affects people in different ways. For example, it can make one person want to eat the entire contents in their fridge while, for another, they lose interest in food entirely. The resulting weight loss or gain can then compound the situation, creating feelings of being out of control, which can then lead to yo-yo dieting, creating a vicious mood cycle.

Scientists are continually discovering that changes in the diet can directly affect the mind. For example, certain

foods heighten the symptoms of illnesses like schizophrenia, while processed foods can contain harmful chemically-based preservatives, which can upset the nervous system. In general terms, a lack of good nutrition can deprive the brain of important nutrients and glucose required for controlling mood.

Studies suggest that symptoms of depression can be reduced with adequate consumption of omega-3 fatty acids found in fish. In fact, omega-3 deficiencies have been associated with an increased risk of attention-deficit disorder, dyslexia, dementia, depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

'Weight gain is a common unwanted side effect of some of the treatments used. Whether from the prescribed medicine itself or from the lack of desire to participate in any physical activity, this is when good eating habits and exercise will be most beneficial. 'They say that someone with a low mood who doesn't need medication but feels low, especially if it's for no particular reason or from external events, that it can clearly remove your depression altogether. With melancholic depression, I have found it to have amazing results,' says Neil.



## BENEFITS OF EXERCISE ON MENTAL HEALTH:

- Enhances self-esteem
- Relieves anxiety and depression
- Increases energy
- Improves sleep patterns
- Helps put you in a better mood

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*Stability in Mind* by Neil Cole is available now (\$24.95, New Holland). Or to enter to win one of three copies, email 50 words or less to [editor@fitnessfirst.com.au](mailto:editor@fitnessfirst.com.au) before 10 December 2012, and tell us why you want to win. Remember to include your postal address.