

The Effect of Physical Activity on Mental Health

Trait or Disorder	Effect	Comments
Depression	Moderate	Decreases symptoms; efficacy similar to psychotherapy in patients with mild-to-moderate depression; unclear whether physical activity (PA) prevents onset of depression, but it may reduce symptom severity
Anxiety	Small-to-moderate	Reduces state anxiety but unclear whether it improves trait anxiety
Panic disorder	Small	Often produces transient increase in anxiety, but anxiety dissipates with time if patient adheres to regimen of activity
Energy/vigor	Large	Intensive PA increases perceived energy level; unclear whether regular PA influences habitual energy levels
Self-esteem	Small-to-moderate	Greatest improvement found in those with low self-esteem before PA
Positive affect	Small-to-moderate	Effect most pronounced if PA involves social interaction
Eating disorders	Unclear	Intensive PA or exercise may be symptom of an eating disorder

Source: Fontaine, 2000