

# Walking Off Depression

If your goal is to get better from depression, then walk, don't run. *Brisk walking* for about 30 minutes a day or 45 minutes every other day treats depression with an effect that's as strong as an antidepressant. It also prevents depression even better than medication, and it improves memory and sleep as well.

Brisk walking is more than a walk but less than a jog. Ideally, it raises your heart rate by at least 10 beats per minute and makes you breathe a little faster. In other words, it's aerobic. Perhaps you already have some aerobics built into your day, or tasks that could become aerobic with a little modification, like putting on some dance music while you sweep the floor. The following are some ideas about how to incorporate more aerobic movement into your routine.

## **Playful Aerobics**

- Swim
- Hike in nature
- Put on audio books or music while you go for a walk
- Dance
- Join a kickball or softball league
- Turn business meetings into walking meetings
- Do jumping jacks
- Shoot hoops
- Roughhouse with your kids
- Roughhouse with your dog
- Go roller- or ice-skating
- Wash the car
- Try belly dancing
- Sign up for an adult gymnastics class
- Use a standing desk
- Park far away
- Play tag with your kids
- Go rowing
- Do your shopping and errands by foot
- Choose an active volunteer job, like Habitat for Humanity
- Explore a new area
- Jump rope or hula hoop
- Walk the dog, or someone else's dog, or volunteer at an animal shelter to walk a dog
- Join a martial arts class
- Do some aerobic cleaning (e.g., scrub, vacuum, sweep, mop, or rake)
- Bike to work

### Indoor Motion

- Join a YMCA or gym with an indoor walking path
- Walk your favorite shopping mall (many malls sponsor walking groups)
- Stay in your living room with a guided indoor walking video (try [www.walkathome.com](http://www.walkathome.com) or search for “happy walk” or “walk at home” on YouTube)
- Play active video games (e.g., Wii tennis, Wii fit, Just Dance)
- Place the treadmill in front of the TV or strap a tablet to your treadmill. You can only watch that show if you’re on it.

What aerobic activities are you already doing each week? How much time do you spend on each of them?

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What are some areas where you could weave exercise into your day?

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If your current level of aerobics is close to zero, don't jump into 30 minutes a day. Instead, start with 10 minutes a day. That alone can make a difference. It's estimated that one in 10 cases of depression would be prevented by this minimal level of motion (Harvey et al., 2018). Once you've been able to stay consistent with 10 minutes a day for a week, move up to 20 minutes. After a week of success there, raise the dose to 30 minutes a day. Should you raise it further beyond that? Probably not. Only one in 12 people benefit from higher doses of aerobics. For the rest of us, it's overkill.

*"I have to exercise in the morning before my brain figures out what I'm doing."*

- Marsha Doble