

## **Script – Print – Taking steps to fight off depression**

For years, we've heard about the many health benefits of walking and exercise in general.

That includes for better mental health.

A new [study](#) published in the journal JAMA Network Open found that the steps we walk each day can help reduce symptoms of depression.

When you're feeling depressed or anxious, walking or any type of exertion might be the last thing you want to do. But a few miles or even a few steps can really go a long way to helping you feel better.

Victor Mendoza, a behavioral health provider for OSF HealthCare, says regular exercise such as walking can release natural brain chemicals called endorphins. It can help ease your mind of worries, help gain confidence and improve social interaction with others.

"It helps you get motivated, helps you get moving and helps you do the things you want to do," Mendoza suggests.

The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes a week of activity for better overall health. When it comes to exercise for improving mental health, Mendoza says the key is getting started – even if it's just five minutes or a quick lap around the block.

The study indicates that no matter the type of activity or intensity, every bit counts when it comes to preventing depression. The research reviewed 33 studies involving more than 96,000 adults.

Taking more steps isn't the only move you can make toward better mental health.

"It can be many things, as long as you're active," advises Mendoza. "I think what's important is you're moving, you're active, and you're doing something like a sport, swimming, walking, anything, as long as it keeps you moving."

Many people struggle with finding the motivation to exercise, especially in the winter. Mendoza recommends going to a mall and walking around the center court or even in the store aisles. If that doesn't work, consider joining a gym, getting a trainer or asking a friend to go for a walk. You need to make the activity enjoyable to keep it up.

"It helps with accountability," says Mendoza. "When you're not feeling good, that gym partner might push you, like, I want to do it. And sometimes we don't want to ruin it for him or her. There are times when we're motivating our gym partners and helping them as well."

Mendoza says exercise helps him to be a better husband, father and medical provider to his clients. After all, he says, juggling work, family life and other commitments can be stressful for most people.

"Now the gym has a new meaning. It's my time to be with myself and exercise. It's my me time," says Mendoza. "It has become an outlet for me, not just my physical health but my mental health as well."

Mendoza stresses it's important to remain patient with yourself when it comes to starting an exercise routine.

"We're going to have some lows, and there's going to be time that we're just going to not be able to be consistent with it, but that's OK. That's part of being human," Mendoza acknowledges. "We are affected by our emotions, and sometimes they don't let us do those things that we know are good for us. It's just giving ourselves some breaks and telling ourselves, today was not a good day, but tomorrow we're going to try again. And restart that process and go back to that exercise routine."

If you are looking for ideas with your walking, YouTube has several treadmill walking routines. And if you want to get your kids involved, there are workout programs, including dancing, you can do together. There are also free versions of apps such as FitOn that allow you to share workouts with friends, send them your favorite advice articles and celebrate achievements.

For more information regarding behavioral or mental health support, visit the [OSF HealthCare](#) website.