Mental Wellbeing: The Positive Effects of Exercise

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Good afternoon all,

With this being Living Streets' Walk to Work Week, we spoke to William Pullen, BACP member and developer of Dynamic Running Therapy (DLT), who gave us a rundown on why exercise can be good for our mental wellbeing:

Along with its known physical benefits, exercise has proven to be a very effective way to boost mental wellbeing, helping to improve mood and self-esteem, as well as being a great way to de-stress. Physical activity can also be a beneficial way to have some fun and meet new people, as well as being a fulfilling activity that can bring with it a real sense of achievement. Whether you join a local football team or sign up for a charity run, setting yourself realistic fitness goals can give you something to aim for and a real sense of accomplishment on completion.

We spoke to BACP member and psychotherapist William Pullen, the developer of Dynamic Running Therapy (DLT), who gave us a rundown on some of the benefits of exercise:

Stress-buster "Regular exercise is a great way to de-stress, and has shown to boost energy levels and improve sleep. Life can be very busy and stressful and it can often be very difficult to make time for exercise, but as little as 20-30 minutes a day – whether it be a run, walk or a trip to the gym – can make such a difference, and will help to keep the blood pumping and the endorphins flowing so you feel more relaxed."

Fun "Exercise doesn't have to be a chore. Not everyone likes going to the gym or for a run, so pick an activity that you actually enjoy doing. The more you like the activity, the less likely you'll find a reason not to do it. Whether it be playing for a football team, joining a swimming club or going out hiking in the countryside, do something you find enjoyable which will motivate you to do it on a regular basis."

Socialise "Joining a sports team or club can also be a great place to meet new people, or spend time with your current friends. Spending time getting fit with like-minded people who enjoy similar interests to you is a great way to socialise and build confidence."

Goal Setting "Setting fitness goals will give you something to aim for when exercising, helping to keep you focused and motivated. Make sure not to over-stretch yourself by making sure your chosen goals are manageable and realistic – start slowly and build them up at a gradual pace.

Accomplishment "Reaching your set fitness goals or doing well at a sport or activity can give you a real sense of achievement. Whether it be reaching a particular weight or winning a competition, such outcomes will bring with it a feeling of accomplishment, helping to boost your self-esteem and self-worth."

Exercise can be an effective way to help boost a person's mental wellbeing, but if you are dealing with long-standing issues that won't go away, the help of a qualified therapist to discuss your problems with may be beneficial. Counselling offers a safe, confidential environment to talk with someone who is trained to listen and help you work through any problems you may be having. You can access therapy through your GP for free, or you can access it privately.

If you decide to access counselling privately, BACP's public website http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/ contains a wealth of information for anyone considering therapy, including information sheets, videos and links to recent research. Its 'find a therapist' directory can also help you to find a private therapist in your local area.

Notes to editors

BACP is a professional body and a registered charity that sets standards for therapeutic practice and provides information for therapists, clients of therapy, and the public. We have over 40,000 members, working within a range of settings, including the NHS, schools and universities, workplaces and private practice, as well as third sector environments including voluntary, community and pastoral settings.

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