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Prescriptions for Life

Walk Off Your Anxiety

When you're anxious and stressed, exercising can do wonders.

Posted Jan 14, 2021



Source: TanteTati / Pixabay

I woke up feeling stressed today. I hadn't gotten enough sleep, so that was probably the main cause, but I've also been unusually busy with work. As I got

up and started to move around, I could feel the telltale flutter of anxiety in my chest. It wasn't tied to anything specific that's going on, it was just there.

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Unless I did something about it, it was going to bother me all day. I had enough to do already. I didn't need or want that yucky anxious feeling following me around.

[As I've written about before](#), low blood sugar can cause anxiety symptoms. I'd already had some food with a good dose of protein and fat, so that likely wasn't the cause today. I'd also done my morning mindfulness practice, but still felt off. What else could I do, to change how I was feeling? I decided to go for a power walk.

There hasn't been a lot of rigorous, well-designed research about the impact of walking on clinical anxiety. However, [a 2018 review article](#) that looked at 15 randomized controlled trials found that aerobic exercise was indeed effective, especially if done at a higher intensity level.

I often share the story of a trauma expert whose lecture I attended at a conference. She told the whole audience that she suffers from Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and that her mandatory morning exercise routine was the one thing that kept her anxiety at bay. If she exercised first thing, it was as if

her anxiety wasn't even a thing.

I recommend exercise to all my mental health patients, and instruct them to pay attention to how they feel after. Over and over, I hear what a powerful impact it has on their moods and their ability to cope with stress.

I made sure that today's walk was truly a "power" walk. When I'm stressed, upset, angry, or anxious, a good brisk stompy walk (easily done with big boots on a snowy path, as I did today) is enormously helpful. I also chose a route with uphill climbs and walked as quickly as I could.

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Though I walked for about forty minutes, it took a while for the stress and anxiety to dissipate. On the return leg of the walk, I could feel it starting to lift.

It wasn't until I was back home, though, and chatting with my husband about some (mildly stressful) home repair issues, that I realized that I was suddenly in a great mood. Whereas the home repair topic might have normally made me feel a little stressed or burdened, I felt positively sunny about it all. It was really striking.

It's now a couple of hours later, and the anxious tension in my chest has been solidly replaced by that sunny optimism. It's hard to imagine that I ever felt

anxious, I feel so different now. I also feel much more awake, and no longer feel that uncomfortable tension that comes from a lack of sleep.

If you're an anxious type, I really recommend that you make exercise a part of your daily life. The brisker, the better. Pay attention to how good it makes you feel, and you'll become an exercise enthusiast for life.

THE BASICS

What Is Anxiety?

[Find a therapist to overcome anxiety](#)

And of course, I always recommend that you speak to your doctor if you're experiencing mental health challenges, as sometimes these symptoms can be caused by other physical health problems. In addition, I recommend getting support from a licensed counseling professional. To find one near you, visit the [Psychology Today Therapy Directory](#).

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