

Exercise Should Be Considered For PTSD Therapy

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Doctors are increasingly prescribing exercise as medicine for their patients to prevent and treat disease and injury. A growing collection of evidence also suggests that exercise can be therapeutic for individuals suffering from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including victims of rape. Research being presented today at the 58th Annual Meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine and 2nd World Congress on *Exercise is Medicine*® evaluated the effect of exercise for the anxiety disorder that affects up to 15 percent of the general population, including approximately 50 percent of female rape victims.

"Preliminary research has revealed that aerobic exercise may be an effective treatment for PTSD," said Erika Smith, lead author of this study. "Previous studies have not utilized a control group and have not compared aerobic exercise to an empirically validated treatment for PTSD. This study aimed to do just that."

Smith and her colleagues from the University of West Florida studied 14 participants who were recruited naturalistically through a Certified Rape Crisis Center in Pensacola, Fla. All participants attended bi-weekly cognitive behavioral therapy sessions, and seven of the participants also attended a minimum of two group circuit training classes per week.

The therapy sessions consisted of cognitive behavior interventions (CBT) as outlined by Dr. Edna Foa. Exercise sessions were 40 minutes in duration, including full-body exercises, and the circuit consisted of 30 seconds per exercise. The research team recorded each participant's PTSD symptoms before and after treatment using the PTSD Checklist - Specific Versions (PCL-S).

Participants from both groups experienced improvement; however, the research team observed a clinically significant improvement in PCL-S score (10+) for participants in the CBT plus exercise group. Based on the study, Smith and her colleagues call for more research on the benefits of aerobic exercise as an adjunct treatment for individuals diagnosed with PTSD and a history of having experienced trauma.

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