

# It's Official: Exercise Can Pave the Path to Better Mental Health

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Studies suggest that health club operators should invest in a wide range of equipment and services to help members improve their physical fitness while also supporting their mental health needs. (Photo courtesy Freemotion from iFit.)

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A recent study by the John W Brick Mental Health Foundation, which analyzed 1,000 scientific studies published over the last 30 years, shows how exercise should be integrated into the prevention and treatment of

mental illness (and the promotion of mental wellness). Called “**Move Your Mental Health Report**,” the research is seen as conclusive proof of the link between exercise and mental health. Overall, approximately 89 percent of all published peer-reviewed research report a positive, statistically significant relationship between exercise/physical activity and mental health.

The report’s conclusion is clear: “Routinely moving our bodies is a key element in the ecosystem of factors that help us to build our mental and emotional well-being.”

“Whether lifting weights, owning the treadmill, strengthening the core with yoga or tai chi, or less rigorous activities – such as walking or household chores – motion is indisputably associated with mental health benefits. Movement activities should be integrated into mental illness treatment, early intervention, and prevention, as well as building and maintaining mental wellness and resilience.”

For the health club industry, the report comes at a perfect time as there is, thanks to the pandemic, already a considerable increase in awareness and interest in a “whole person health” approach. This is because while COVID-19 directly highlighted the importance of physical fitness in fighting off serious illness, lockdowns and other disruptions also placed huge pressures on people’s mental health. From social isolation to economic worries, the past 20 months have been challenging on many levels for millions around the world.

The pandemic’s detrimental effects on both physical and mental health are substantiated by troubling data from Johns Hopkins Medicine, which shows that one in four adults in the United States (26 percent) now suffers from a diagnosable mental health condition. It is a hugely alarming statistic. Sadly, the picture is similar across the world. In the United Kingdom, data from mental health charity Mind shows the level to be strikingly similar, with a quarter of adults affected.

And that is why the “Move Your Mental Health Report” comes at an advantageous time for the global health club industry. It confirms how the

club sector can — and should — play a substantial role in mitigating the mental health crisis.

The research overwhelmingly supports a beneficial role of exercise and increased physical activity for addressing mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety. A combination of cardiovascular and aerobic exercise and strength training at moderate to high intensity several times per week appears to be supported by the evidence. Exercise also seems to improve mental health through social and self-efficacy pathways, and biological pathways, such as increasing brain neurotransmitters and improving hormone function involved in mental health.

The report offers insight into specific types of physical exercise and the benefits they provide to mental health. For example, evidence uncovered in the research “strongly supports” cardiovascular/aerobic exercise for reducing depression, while high-intensity exercise regimens are generally more effective than low-intensity regimens.

Interestingly, the report suggests that combining (or alternating) strength/resistance training with cardiovascular/aerobic exercise shows stronger benefits on mental health outcomes than either one alone.

However, mindfulness-based activities — though they can be lower intensity forms of movement — deliver more mental health benefits than walking. Yoga and other mindful exercises such as tai chi and qigong also show “strong evidence” for reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Therefore, the report’s findings seem to suggest that clubs should invest in a wide range of equipment and services to provide members with an offer that not only improves their physical fitness but also supports their mental health needs.

This is where **Freemotion Fitness** can help. From inclusive strength training to interactive cardio machines connected to **iFIT** — the world’s only truly interactive connected fitness platform — Freemotion boasts all the tools members need to achieve whole-person health. Plus, the recently launched **iFIT Mind** experience offers unique, groundbreaking workouts that expand the definition of what it means to exercise.

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