

Q & A Mindline



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Q I have heard that you often advise people to exercise to overcome depression and anxiety. Isn't it easier said than done?

Indeed it is easier said than done. But if it was easy, then we didn't have to say it at all! It does seem sensible to think that when you have anxiety or depression, exercise may seem like the last thing you want to do. But formal feedback from people who have indulged in regular exercise (30-45 minutes) for four-five days per week report profound benefits with their sense of well-being, both physical and emotional. Personally, I enjoy the day better after a session of exercise or running in the morning.

So, how does one get motivated? Let's start with scientific data which suggests that exercise helps prevent and improve a number of health problems, including high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis. Research made on anxiety, depression and exercise shows that the psychological and physical benefits of exercise can also help reduce anxiety and improve mood as well as reduce reoccurrence of stress and psychiatric problems. Exercise works by releasing feel good brain chemicals, boosts

the immune system and raises body temperature that has a calming effect. Additionally, it increases confidence, improves posture and not to forget, makes one look good too.

Time for some quotes: 'If you can't get motivated to go to the gym then go to the gym to get motivated.' 'You don't get positive reinforcement and feedback for staying in bed but you do for getting out of bed.' Another quote I remember is that 'Food is the most commonly abused anti-anxiety substance and exercise is the most under utilized anti-depressant.'

Why wait until you get overwhelmed and take reactive measures. Why not take up preventive fitness programmes to 'raise your threshold' for getting affected by stress and burnout which are becoming inevitable parts of our life. I also came across a nice poster in one of the gyms that read, 'You are one exercise session away from a better mood.' Enough said.

Q I need advice about erectile problems. Who do I consult? Please help.

Erectile dysfunction or ED is a sexual problem characterized by the inability to develop or maintain an erection of the penis during sexual performance. It is an awkward condition, associated with personal distress, unwarranted guilt and embarrassment. I think ED is the most poorly understood and mismanaged of all disorders.

In many, ED may be associated with lack of experience and associated worry for the ability to perform. In others, it may be due to a limited understanding about sex and intimacy. Psychological problems like stress, anxiety and depression may contribute or worsen ED.

Not many people are aware that in many cases, physical rather than psychological causes are responsible for ED. Therefore, it is important to look for physical causes which may include smoking, alcohol, high cholesterol, medication - antidepressant (SSRI), kidney and bladder/prostate issues, nerve or spinal cord damage, low levels of testosterone (primary sex hormone in men) and ageing.

Many men also are reluctant to discuss erectile dysfunction with their doctors due to embarrassment and thus the condition is under diagnosed. However, it is said to afflict as much as 10 per cent of the male population. Above the age of 40, nearly 52 per cent men are affected.

Commonly, those suffering with ED go to an urologist (kidney surgeon) but many consult a psychiatrist in the first instance. Typical evaluation will include physical examination (including genital examination) and routine blood test to assess status of sugar, kidney, thyroid, and liver, besides hormone profile. Additionally, penile Doppler may be done to check blood flow.

The negative psychological impact of this condition on an individual's psyche is enormous. Therefore, irrespective of the causes, an involvement of a psychiatrist is paramount for detailed assessment and treatment of any underlying psychological or psychiatric issues, including effective advice on anxiety management, confidence building and addressing relationship issues.

In all cases, professional consultation will help in exploring and addressing many of the above issues. For many couples counselling/therapy will go a long way in restoring interpersonal confidence.