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Help to get you started: EXERCISING FOR MENTAL HEALTH

If you have read **WHAT HAS SLEEP, DIET AND EXERCISE GOT TO DO WITH MENTAL HEALTH** then you'll know why exercise is so important for your mental health.

To get the most benefit, research suggest that 20-30 minutes a day, 3 times a week is a minimum practice. Current studies also suggest that 4-5 times a week is best. But if you are a beginner, then any exercise at all is a step in the right direction. So, start where you are comfortable. Explore ways of making it enjoyable and workable as a part of your lifestyle. Even a 10 minute 'energy walk' has been found to increase energy and lift mood. Check with your GP before starting any exercise program. This is particularly important for people with a medical condition or if you have not exercised much in the past.

Here's some tips for getting started:

- Values. Identify what this goal (of increasing exercise) is in the service of? What value underpins your interest in exercising and makes it meaningful? For example, do you want to exercise because your value Health and Fitness, Self-care, Mental Resilience or something else? To explore values more fully, you might want to do a search for a values checklist on the internet so you can identify why increasing your exercise regime is important to you. Then write it down next to your exercise plan to remind you why you are setting this goal for yourself.
- Choose an activity you enjoy. It helps a lot if exercising is fun and not a chore.
- Walking can often be an easy choice because it doesn't require any special equipment and there's little chance of injury.
- Consider finding yourself a walking partner. As long as they are committed to doing the exercise, most activities are more fun with company. Do some research. Google walking groups, activities run by local community centre, church, school, online classes. Make a plan for inclement weather.
- Set a modest goal: Something you can be very confident you can achieve. It is better you start with a small and highly achievable goal so that you experience success rather than setting the bar too high for yourself and feeling disheartened when you can't maintain the momentum.
- Plan the steps you will take to achieve this goal and write them into your calendar or set reminders in your phone. For example, *"In the next 24 hours I will ring a friend and ask if ... (friend) will be my walking partner. In 2 days' time, on (date) I will walk for 10 minutes in the park up the road. I will repeat this activity on ... day, day and Day"*.
- Set a longer-term goal if having something to work towards is helpful to you. For example, what exercise level would you like to achieve in 2 months? In 6 months?

Be specific. The more measurable the goal, the better. Write it down and put it somewhere where you will see it and be reminded of what you want to achieve with this goal.

- Add a variety of exercises so you don't get bored. What are activities you are interested in? How might these be integrated into regular exercise?
- As you engage in your exercise, bring more conscious awareness to what you can see, hear, smell, feel in your body. Connecting to your senses helps bring you into present moment awareness.
- Acknowledge your success. This might involve noticing the good feelings as they arise that come out of doing the exercise, engaging in the activity and/or achieving your goals. Reward yourself in some way.
- **Have fun!!**