



Counseling Patients About A Healthy Exercise Plan

The Challenge: Providers must have a broad understanding of a patient's physical condition and lifestyle to help implement exercise. Most people are aware of the benefits of exercise and physical activity, however the difficulty lies in implementing a program that is enjoyable and sustainable. Patient compliance due to lifestyle, available time and physical ability are challenging to both patient and provider, however exercise plans must be introduced as a necessary 'lifestyle change' when a provider can see harm if current damaging habits are continued.

The Obstacles:

- Many providers have little or no training in developing exercise programs.
- Lack of clinical time can restrict conversations as much as patient reluctance or desire to change such a global obstacle as lifestyle, 'just to reduce back pain'.
- Patient willingness to choose exercise as an option may be perceived as too time consuming - "Can't you just give me a pill, massage or adjust my back?"
- Patient education needed to appreciate the long term goals of exercise.

The Evidence: Exercise has been referred to as a 'miracle cure' or 'the best buy for public health'. It's been linked to improved health in many areas, e.g. heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's and depression, to name a few. Outcomes achieved with the recommended 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity for health related conditions can't be claimed by any other single intervention. Read more about this in The New York Times article by Aaron Carroll called "Closest Thing to a Wonder Drug? Try Exercise".¹

Increasing evidence points to sedentary lifestyle as a greater cause of ill health than obesity.² However, obesity must be considered when factoring the cause of chronic pain in weight bearing joints. Obese patients may benefit from water exercise plans.³ The buoyancy of water can reduce weight by 90%, reducing stress on weight bearing joints and muscles. Cardiovascular fitness, in the form of decreased blood pressure, can show improvement in a 10 week water exercise plan. Hydrostatic pressure helps circulation and may reduce inflammatory reactions in patient with autoimmune disease or diabetes. There is also a strong link between exercise and mood enhancement.⁴ Epidemiological evidence points to lower depression rates in populations that exercise regularly. Exercise has been shown to be comparable to antidepressants for patients with major mood disorder (Psychosomatic Medicine, 2007). Regular Exercise also appears to reduce depression relapse.

Here's How You Can Help:

- Intake forms should include questions about exercise. Do you exercise? If yes, how often and what do you do? If no, would you like help with an exercise plan that works for your lifestyle and physical abilities?
- Meet with local gym managers. See if you can get discount coupons for referrals. This may provide incentive for patients to begin a regular program. This could also build mutual referrals.
- Look for local Yoga classes and attend if possible before referring. You may discuss your plan to refer with the instructor. This could also help build mutual referrals.^{5,6}
- See if any local universities or gyms have exercise courses that might inspire you to begin your own simple stretch class at the office with current patients. Check into 'group billing' for exercise therapy sessions – 97150.⁷
- Suggested reading: Exercise for Mood and Anxiety: Proven Strategies for Overcoming Depression and Enhancing Well-Being, by Michael Otto and Jasper A. J. Smits.
- Suggested reading: 7 Steps of Hope (Healing the Emotional, Mental and Spiritual Impact of Chronic Illness and Disability), by Nancy Gordon LCSW. Also see: www.NancyGordonGlobal.com
- Provide articles for parents of children with poor psychomotor performance and poor scholastic abilities in school; showing how yoga may help. Children who perform regular yoga practices, showed higher self-efficacy and improved performance compared with control group. Self-efficacy measures self- confidence and plays a major role in scholastic achievements.⁸
- Maintain a library of exercise DVD's for patient check out or suggested purchase. Make certain to have viewed the DVD's prior to suggesting.

¹ Carroll A. Closest thing to a wonder drug? Try exercise. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/21/upshot/why-you-should-exercise-no-not-to-lose-weight.html?_r=0. Accessed August 11, 2016.

² Flegal KM, Graubard BI, Williamson DF, Gail MH. Excess Deaths Associated With Underweight, Overweight, and Obesity. JAMA. 2005;293(15):1861-1867. doi:10.1001/jama.293.15.1861.

³ Top Reasons to Train in the Pool <http://www.ideafit.com/fitness-library/top-reasons-to-train-in-the-pool>

⁴ American Psychology Association 'The Exercise Effect' <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/12/exercise.aspx>

⁵ The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine: Health Benefits of Yoga and Exercise: A Review of Comparison Studies <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/acm.2009.0044>

⁶ The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine: Effects of Yoga Versus Walking on Mood, Anxiety, and Brain GABA Levels: A Randomized Controlled MRS Study <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/acm.2010.0007>

⁷ Coding Interpretations: Group Therapy Patient Scenarios <http://www.apta.org/Payment/Coding/GroupTherapyScenarios/>

⁸ Influence of Yoga-Based Personality Development Program on Psychomotor Performance and Self-efficacy in School Children June 2016 <http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fped.2016.00062/full>