

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Depression, Antidepressants and Exercise”

One in five Americans, over the age of 12 years, suffers from depression and 11% of the U.S. population over the age of 12 are on antidepressant medication. Recently, the FDA issued a “Public Health Advisory” that warned citizens about the risks associated with the whole new generation of antidepressants including Prozac and its knock offs, Zoloft, Paxil, Luvox, Celexa, and Lexapro, as well as Wellbutrin, Effexor, Serzone, and Remeron. The FDA warned that such antidepressant drugs might increase suicides in a small percentage of children and adults. Sadly, little attention has been given to the FDA’s additional warning that certain behaviors are “known to be associated with these drugs,” including “anxiety, agitation, panic attacks, insomnia, irritability, hostility, impulsivity, akathisia (severe restlessness), hypomania, and mania.” These and similar effects are a result of their impact on a neurotransmitter in the brain called serotonin (the “happiness” neurotransmitter). The most common class of antidepressants block serotonin reuptake or reabsorption (SSRIs). Even stopping antidepressants may cause withdrawal reactions that last days and sometimes longer, causing some patients to feel depressed, suicidal or even violent. The largest and most extensive study of its kind, has revealed that regular exercise of any intensity can prevent future depression – and just one hour can help. The results, published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, show that even small amounts of exercise can protect against depression, with mental health benefits seen regardless of age or gender. Twelve percent of cases of depression could have been prevented if participants undertook just one hour of physical activity each week. Also, a new study has shown that people who do resistance exercises like weight lifting may experience less anxiety than people who don’t workout. The study was published in *Sports Medicine* and found that resistance workouts were associated with a reduction in anxiety symptoms. Effects of resistance exercise on the brain are not as well understood as the impact of aerobic workouts and emerging research has also linked resistance training to less shrinkage of white matter in the brain. Another study suggests common antidepressants may pose a very serious risk to health; they drastically raise the risk of mortality 33%. Users were 14% more likely to have a stroke or a heart attack. Reportedly, one in ten people in the U.S.A. rely on antidepressants and 1 in 4 women in their 40s and 50s take antidepressants.

In the America that I love, the best advice seems to be to get regular exercise that is tolerable and enjoyable. That could mean just a walk for some or vigorous workouts for others. So, like it or not, “just do it,” because exercise has far less potential for toxicity or adverse effects than antidepressants.

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