You can really help yourself by boosting your energy and stamina to cope better with the issues you face. Exercise can make a tremendous difference to how quickly you recover from depression.

Research suggests that exercise can sometimes be as effective as antidepressants at reducing symptoms of depression. It has been proved that regular exercise lifts your mood and reduces stress and anxiety.

That's because exercise boosts the release of feel good hormones in the brain called endorphins. Exercise has also been found to enhance your self-esteem. Furthermore, if you exercise outdoors then the natural daylight will also trigger the release of serotonin, another mood enhancing hormone – so exercise outdoors and you get a double hit of mood enhancers.

The best exercise for combating depression?

Moderate intensity aerobic exercise. This is the equivalent of a brisk walk, so exercise is an option for everyone.

For walking to be of benefit to your health it really needs to be a brisk walk. This means walking at an intensity that makes you:

• Breathe a little faster.

• Feel warmer.

• Have a slightly faster heart beat.

• Sweat slightly.

The correct walking speed depends on a person's age and fitness. You need to build up your level of activity gradually. Brisk walking is best, but for sedentary people gentle strolling is a good start.

Tips for getting the most out of a brisk walk

These are the techniques used in power walking – which is just brisk walking dressed up to sound good!

• Feet first.

• Stride out.

• Don't swing your hips.

•   Use your arms.

•   Get your pace right.

Think 'feet first'

This means walk through your whole foot. Each time the foot hits the ground be aware of walking through the heel, arch of the foot and pushing off the toes, so you create a stride rather than a step.

Don't swing your hips

Keep them stabilised. Imagine you have a glass of wine on each hip and you have to keep them full as you walk. To do this you will need to draw up and in through your tummy muscles. This will also help improve your posture and help flatten your tummy.

Do not walk with rounded shoulders

The best way to do this is to make as much distance as possible between your shoulders and your ear lobes – this helps you look leaner and taller and also helps to align your spine correctly, reducing stiffness and soreness.

Your speed when walking actually comes from your arms To speed up try swinging your arms faster, your legs will automatically follow and move faster too.

Walking at the right pace doesn't mean walking at a breakneck speed. Find your own optimum pace that you are comfortable with and which gets you breathing a little bit harder and feeling a little bit warmer. As you progress and get used to the time you spend walking, then increase your pace - always keep it feeling comfortable. But do not be afraid to stretch yourself.

Sample walking programme

The following chart is intended for those who are beginning an exercise programme and feel that walking is suitable for achieving their aims and goals.

Other top tips:

It is strongly advised not to walk alone but to arrange to go out with a friend or partner.

Also:

- Always obey traffic and countryside laws.
- Be cautious if you like to listen to music while you walk because it can make you less aware of what is going on around you.
- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Wear layers in cold weather to keep you warm.
- Carry some water to prevent dehydration, especially if the weather is hot.
- Warm up before your walk by strolling for 5 minutes and cool down at the end of your walk by slowing down for 5 minutes. Then stretch out your legs, shoulders and arm muscles.

Week	Activity	Distance (miles)	Time (minutes)	Frequency (times per week)
1-2	Walking	0.5	10	5
3-4	Walking	1.0	20	5
5-6	Walking	1.0	19	5
7-8	Walking	1.5	26	5
9-10	Walking	1.5	24	5
11-12	Walking	2.0	32	5
13-14	Walking	2.0	30	5
15-16	Walking	2.5	38	5
17-18	Walking	2.5	36	5
19-20	Walking	3.0	48	5
21-22	Walking	3.0	47	5
23-24	Walking	3.0	46	5
25-26	Walking	3.0	45	5
27-28	Walk/jog	3.0	41	5
29-30	Walk/jog	3.0	40	5

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