

Foreword

by J. Alexander Bodkin, M.D.

Anxiety and depression are among the most common afflictions facing the human race. Add alcohol and drug abuse, and you are talking about problems that face close to half the population of the United States, at some point in life.

Many remedies have been offered over the years for these often crippling problems. These days, medicines have come to predominate in the treatment of depression and anxiety, as have support groups for addiction problems. A great variety of individual and group psychotherapies are also available and are widely used to help individuals cope with these difficulties.

But one very effective approach has been unaccountably neglected: strength training.

In my clinical work with people suffering from mood and anxiety problems, and the substance abuse that often follows from these, I have found time and time again that consistent, reasonable exercise is a great help. By the time people get to me as patients, exercise alone is no longer

enough, but it remains a critical component of a total treatment program. Exercise will hasten recovery, improve well being, increase stress tolerance, relieve physical discomforts, improve physical health and appearance, and boost self-esteem and self-confidence.

The problem is that when people are feeling negatively about themselves, and often painfully self-conscious, going to a gym is the last thing they want to do. For one thing, they wouldn't know where to begin. It just seems like one more opportunity to fail and to be found wanting—in public. The task I face is to get them beyond that point—and my main resource has been to refer them to Jeff Rutstein for consultation and guidance.

Obviously, that is not a resource available to large numbers of people facing these difficult problems, and this book provides a very positive, new alternative.

Some of the ways a well-designed fitness program helps depression and related conditions are:

- ✦ It expresses self-worth—that a person's own body is worth a concerted effort to strengthen and improve.
- ✦ It offers concrete and plain-to-see evidence of progress—the weight you can move with each muscle group steadily advances as long as you just stay at it—as do the distance you can run and the miles you can bike and the laps you can swim.
- ✦ Appearance improves—the physical consequences of passive self-neglect are quite visible. Likewise,

they are also quite visible when self-neglect is replaced by proper self-care.

- ✦ Physical comfort improves—the aches and pains and fatigue that typically accompany anxiety and depression become less and less noticeable.
- ✦ Sleep improves when a person tires himself or herself out with healthy physical exertion.
- ✦ The mind is redirected from troubling thoughts to the task at hand—offering some of the benefits of meditation.
- ✦ After a workout, a person has a much greater capacity to relax—where before they may have felt only tension.
- ✦ Compulsive eating typically drops away with exercise—to be replaced by a healthy appetite for what the body actually needs.
- ✦ Biologically, exercise causes the brain to release neurotransmitters known as endorphins and enkephalins, natural compounds that relieve pain both in the body and in the psyche.

It is true that exercise alone will not suffice if depressive feelings, anxious worries, and the destructive self-treatment of these problems through substance abuse have reached a level of severity that requires professional help. However, if these problems are addressed early enough, then following a healthy, carefully thought-out fitness program may be all that is needed. The use of more invasive treatments—from antidepressants to psychotherapy—may then never become necessary.

This book puts a carefully thought-out, safe, and do-able fitness program at the fingertips of people who need it. The personal odyssey it relates is compelling, and the stories of success from a series of Jeff's clients encourage the reader to give this approach a try. Jeff is doing a public service by making his physical approach to mental health available to a much wider community.

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