



It probably doesn't come as news to anyone that the sluggish economy is, literally, a real downer. In fact, studies show that – not surprisingly – a depressed economy makes us depressed as well. According to a new survey by New York-based market research company Euro RSCG Worldwide, 45 percent of male respondents and 33 percent of women say that the current economic situation negatively affects their mood.

There is, however, a silver lining in these findings: a solid 39 percent of respondents say they are fighting the doldrums by exercising more.

These people are definitely doing the right thing, because there's abundant proof that exercise can improve our mood and relieve stress. As a matter of fact, a Boston University study released last year showed that a regular fitness routine can be as effective as certain medications in treating depression; some may say even more effective, because there are only positive side effects with a training regimen.

How can exercise help combat the blues? There are several ways:

- It helps release emotional tension and pent-up frustrations, and distracts us from the worries and negative thoughts that feed anxiety.
- Exercise produces endorphins and raises the body's levels of dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine - natural "feel good" chemicals.

- Exercise boosts our confidence and makes us more resilient against the effects of stress and anxiety. The more you workout, the better you'll be able to handle difficult situations.
- It is common for depressed people to feel helpless. True, you can't fix the economy single-handedly, but knowing that you are doing something positive for your own life and health will give you a sense of control and empowerment.
- It will positively affect the way you think about yourself and your life, and let's not forget that thoughts lead to feelings, feelings lead to actions, and those actions could translate to more positive effects in your life.

What kind of fitness routine will lift your mood most effectively? The one that you enjoy and will stick with! If you opt for a workout that doesn't excite or challenge you, it will be difficult to get any therapeutic benefits from it. I recommend a tension-busting exercise regimen that includes strength training and interval training. When you fully exert, then you can fully relax. After you fully exert, you may want to also include some breathing exercises while you stretch all of the major muscle groups.

This way, you will not only release tension, but also boost your heart health and build up muscle mass – essentials for overall health and directly correlated with living a longer, healthier life. Just the knowledge that you are taking such good care of yourself will lift your spirits... in good times and bad.

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