



# Move your body. Move your mood.

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Regular physical activity can make us feel better, put us in a better mood, invigorate our bodies, quiet our minds, eradicate boredom, stave off depression, and bolster our ability to cope with stress and anxiety.<sup>1,2</sup> Physical activity can bring about life-changing transformation by improving our state of mind and being.

*Move Your Mood* is a locally-developed, community-supported and provincially-funded program for youth. This program idea was initiated by an interest in the Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) successful *Minding Our Bodies* program for adult Ontarians with chronic mental illness. The Alberta Health Services Children's Team at Red Deer Mental Health were inspired by the CMHA work and questioned, "How could a physical activity program benefit youth accessing mental health services?"

Prior to implementing a program, the benefits of physical activity for mental health in youth were investigated. This led to a literature review and research project being co-developed and implemented by Alberta Health Services and Red Deer College's Rural Health Researcher, Dr. Scott Oddie.

## Reason for a Physical Activity Program with the Adolescent Population

In young people, mental health can impact schooling outcomes, social development, capacity to contribute to the workforce and community, and suicide. Approximately 15% of children and adolescents are affected by a diagnosable mental illness,<sup>3</sup> and 34% of students in Grades 7 to 12 report symptoms of depression, anxiety or social dysfunction.<sup>4</sup> This clearly indicates that our children and adolescents are struggling to navigate life's challenges.

According to best-practices, mental health can be improved, not only by focusing on the problem, but also by enhancing positive factors.<sup>5</sup> One positive factor that young people can change in their lives is their level of physical activity. People who exercise 2 to 3 times per week show lower levels of depression, anger, stress and other negative emotions than those who do not.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, greater mental resilience is reported among adolescents with higher physical activity levels.<sup>7</sup>

Physical activity is an essential part of the healthy development of youth, and it supports the maintenance of psychological wellbeing.<sup>8</sup> Sedentary behaviour and low levels of physical activity participation during this time can result in behavioural and emotional

## S U M M A R Y

Physical activity is an essential part of the development of healthy youth and supports the maintenance of psychological wellbeing.

This article shares the findings and recommendations from the Alberta-based *Move Your Mood* physical activity program for youth seeking mental health support.

challenges that impact youth socially, emotionally, physiologically, and academically.<sup>9,10</sup> A study by Rethon and colleagues<sup>11</sup> found that every additional hour of physical activity children performed was associated with an 8% decrease in their odds of reporting depressive symptoms. Also physical activity participation has been associated with an improvement in children’s coping mechanisms and lowered perceived stress.<sup>10,12</sup> This would indicate that physical activity can improve resiliency and possibly be used as a preventative measure for those at higher risk of developing challenges to mental wellness. Despite the benefits, only 7% of children and adolescents achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity.<sup>13</sup>

There are several theories of the underlying mechanisms for the positive effects that physical activity has on psychological wellness, although no clear consensus among researchers has been agreed upon. One theory proposes the release of dopamine and beta endorphins during physical exercise results in a state of relaxation.<sup>14</sup> Others propose the increase in endorphins, norepinephrine, serotonin, and core body temperature from physical activity result in a positive mental state.<sup>8,10</sup> Other psychosocial explanations indicate that physical activity results in distraction, task mastery, positive social interactions, and improved mood through gains in self-esteem.<sup>8,11</sup>

### Move Your Mood

The literature review and Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines<sup>15</sup> were used to design the *Move Your Mood* program and study. The primary purpose of this study was to assess the impact of including physical activity in current treatment programs for youth. The 8-week physical activity program monitored depression, coping, perceptions of physical activity, self-reported mood, and stress. We hypothesized that mental wellness and physical activity attitudes/perceptions in youth would improve as a result of participation in *Move Your Mood* (see [http://file.scirp.org/Html/8-6901339\\_52344.htm](http://file.scirp.org/Html/8-6901339_52344.htm) for the academic article).

### Effects of Physical Activity

Figure 1 shows the participants’ responses to the motivation, coping and depression measures before, after 4 weeks of program participation, and at the conclusion of the 8-week program. Analysis indicated significant improvements in participants’ motivation to exercise and ability to cope. There was also a significant decrease in self-reported depression scores.

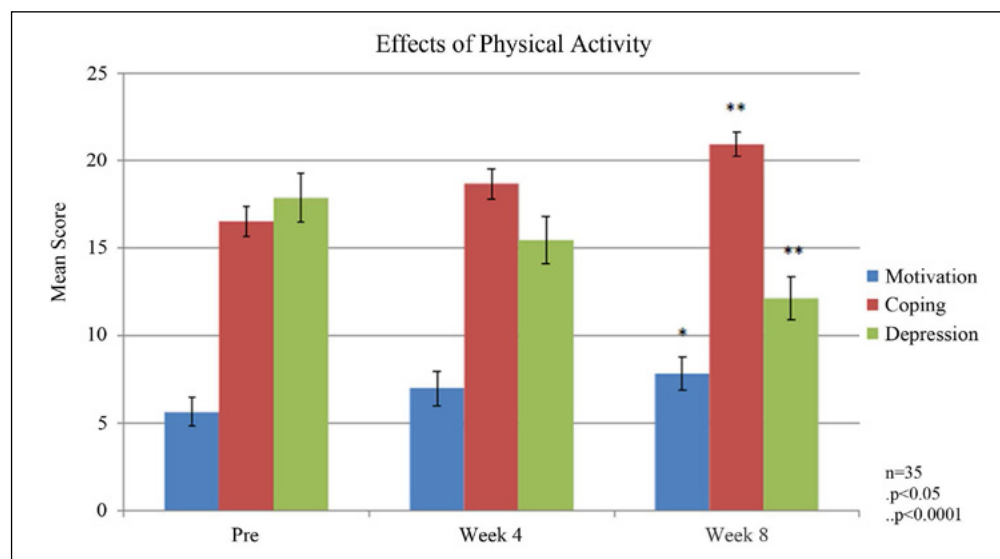


Figure 1

*Every additional hour of children’s physical activity was associated with an 8% decrease in their odds of reporting depressive symptoms.*



### Recommendations from *Move Your Mood*:

*Move Your Mood* has continued to be a successful program running four times a year in 8-week intervals. Some keys to *Move Your Mood*'s success include the following:

- Have a team that wants to engage youth in healthy lifestyle programming.
- Have a relationship and referral system in place with agencies working with children and youth.
- Employ qualified exercise professional (CSEP-CEP certification) to counsel youth and families. Determine physical activity interests and opportunities to develop a personalized physical activity plan.
- Make the connection between physical activity and mental health meaningful to the youth. For example, help youth reflect on their mood and stress before and after participation in physical activity.
- Connect to the community to improve access and opportunities to high quality facilities and program leaders. Working with the local community has resulted in children and youth obtaining continued access to facilities after completing the program.
- Make the program fun, engaging and challenging. Lead classes through various creative ways to move the body and improve physical literacy among children and youth.
- Incorporate other healthy lifestyle messages, e.g., *Fuel Your Body & Expand Your Mind* lessons which include positive body image, self-esteem, mindfulness, relaxation, healthy relationships and positive coping strategies (e.g., listening to music, giving back to the community, being thankful, laughing and being yourself.)
- Develop a followup plan for students to continue after the program.
- Be a caring adult that can make a positive impact and difference in a child's life.

### MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

*As a Bachelor in Physical Education graduate with CSEP-CEP certification, I did not foresee working in Mental Health. But I could not have asked for a better position and program to develop with the Alberta Health Services Team.*

*My overall goal would be for this program to exist for all teens accessing Mental Health Services. But also to simply expand and share this message by working with other professionals, schools and families on how important physical activity is for healthy physical and mental health development. By helping kids be motivated to move, confident to move and competent to move, we create positive self-esteem that they can use for a life time. If you are an Exercise Professional and have the ability to make community connections, think about this target population and how you could make a difference.*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Denise Fredeen's** interest for physical activity and exercise began in high school with a great physical education teacher and mentor. She has a Diploma in Fitness & Health Promotion from Red Deer College and a Bachelor of Physical Education from the University of Alberta with a specialty in Active Living and Well Being. Denise worked as the Be Fit for Life Coordinator at Red Deer College, and then later joined Alberta Health Services as a Health Promotion Facilitator, which led to the development of the *Move Your Mood* program.

## USEFUL LINKS

The Mind Guide to Physical Activity  
[www.mentalhealthintheuk.co.uk/Mindguidetophysicalactiv.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthintheuk.co.uk/Mindguidetophysicalactiv.pdf)

Physical Activity and Mental Health  
[www.healthyalberta.com/620.htm](http://www.healthyalberta.com/620.htm)

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