

Mental Health & Physical Activity

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We are now living in a time where there is a rapid growth of awareness and emphasis put on both positive and negative mental health, especially in the male population. This can be maintaining your current state or trying to improve negative symptoms of commonly seen mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. The student population is one that is far from immune from the pressures of life piled up with exam stress, grades and future job anxiety and social and financial pressure. A recent survey of 1800 students saw “Over a quarter of UK students (37%) are experiencing their state of mental wellbeing changing for the worse since starting higher education”. This melting pot of worries can unknowingly lead into mild or extreme mental health symptoms and illnesses.

A way that is commonly overlooked when it comes to maintaining or improving mental health is one that is; free, available for all ages, works entirely round your schedule, available mostly anywhere and anytime, be done solo or with others, and that is... Physical Activity. At the risk of sounding patronising, if you could bottle up the benefits of physical activity from both a mental and physical point of view, you would be on Forbes top 10 by 2022. There is an extremely well documented and positive relationship between physical activity and alleviating symptoms of common health problems such as mild to severe anxiety and depression. A study of 100 UK university students shows that “students who engaged in high levels of physical activity showed significantly lower levels of anxiety and depression than the medium and low physical activity groups.” It is thought likely that this is a combination of physiological, biochemical and psycho-social aspects. However, it’s not just the act of physical activity, but also the process of engaging in physical activity that can be influential and act as a positive distraction to symptoms. On top of this, the social element when physical activity is done with others can also create a support network and help promote mental wellbeing.

Physical activity is by no means completing the local triathlon and it is always relative to your current level. This can mean; cycling instead of getting the bus, joining one of the diverse range of University sports teams or being a part of a local football power league, the options are many and they can always be suited to your situation. Further to this, the University has just completed its state-of-the-art Copperas Hill facility that will be opening soon that includes a two-storey building with outstanding facilities such as an eight-court sports hall, two multi-purpose halls and a state-of-the-art gym. For any support with ideas or directions, you can find a tonne of great information on the following websites:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-fitness-ideas/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Fitness-activities-and-classes/LocationSearch/671>
- <https://lifestyles.liverpool.gov.uk/>

The Technogym Mywellness app offers all staff and students free access to over 100 on-demand virtual fitness classes. This is a great way to help you stay fit, healthy and active, during the current lockdown and beyond. To sign up simply create an account [here](#) using your LJMU email address, then download the app and log in to access the classes. For enquiries please contact activeljmu@ljmu.ac.uk.

To summarise, mental health is something that should be treated in the same regard to physical health and I hope this article will help you to think more about how physical activity can benefit everyone with their own mental wellbeing.

Tyson, P., Wilson, K., Crone, D., Brailsford, R. and Laws, K., 2010. Physical activity and mental health in a student population. *Journal of mental health*, 19(6), pp.492-499.

<https://www.randstad.co.uk/employers/areas-of-expertise/student-support/student-mental-health-report-2020/>