

Exercise referral for depression – frequently asked questions

My depressed patients are often unfit and lacking in motivation. Will they be able to adhere to a programme of exercise?

Treatment completion rates for exercise referral schemes are often much higher than for medication,¹³ and exercise has been found to be one of the most popular treatments among patients.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ While all patients ought to be offered exercise referral, no patient should be referred unless they are willing to undertake an exercise programme. Once they have been referred, patients will be given an individually tailored programme to suit their fitness and motivation levels.

In a busy medical practice, won't referring patients for exercise be very time-consuming?

No. The referral process is quick and straightforward, and because exercise therapy involves referring patients to other qualified professionals, it enables GPs and health practitioners to share the burden of managing patients' care plans.

How do I find out more about referral schemes for my patients with depression?

Exercise referral schemes are usually delivered through a partnership of primary care organisations and local leisure services. Although not all GPs have access to a scheme, their numbers are growing. Contact the health promotion team at your local PCT to find out about referral schemes in your area.

How can I help my patients to understand the treatment?

The Mental Health Foundation has produced a leaflet on exercise referral for patients. Email mhf@mhf.org.uk to order copies of the patient leaflet. A charge will be levied to cover postage costs when placing bulk orders.