Exercise Vs. Anxiety: The Drug-Free Solution That Works Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Welcome

Hello, hello and welcome back to Hormones and Mental Health. Overcoming anxiety, depression and ADHD. I'm your co-host, Doctor Sharon Stills. So excited to be here with you.

I love bringing these wonderful conversations to you that can truly change your life. And I have a dear friend and colleague with me today, Deborah Atkinson.

Many of you may know her. She is the flippin 50 gal and she is an exercise maestro. I mean, she just understands how the body works and what you need to do.

And when I knew I was participating in this summit, I knew that I had to have her on because yes, we're talking about hormones and the correlation. But as I always say, we need to put hormones into a happy, healthy, balanced terrain and exercise is one of the best things you can do for your mental health.

And so today we're going to have a conversation and we're going to really break it down. So you understand the benefits that exercise can bring to you.

If you are struggling with any of these mental health issues anxiety, depression, ADHD, etc.. So she's written books, she has podcast, she's prolific online, and now she's here with us today to talk to you.

So welcome, Deb, to the summit. Always a pleasure. Thank you so much for having me. And so great to talk about this so important topic. Yeah, because I think a lot of times when we're talking about exercise, we're like, I don't want my muffin top, I want to zip my jean does I want to drop down and size. And you know, that's cool.

I'm not I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, but I really want to talk about, like you say, exercise is a dose of neurotransmitters. So maybe we can just start with that.

And what do you mean by that. Yeah. Well I think so many people are familiar if you are into exercise at all.

Exercise as Neurotransmitter Support

We're familiar of back in the day, we used to talk all about the endorphins, but we're really talking on a deeper level when we connect the dots to depression, anxiety, and helping ourselves relax and sleep better.

We're talking about serotonin, we're talking about dopamine, and we're talking even in exercise on some level about oxytocin. If we're exercising in a way that will give us that.

And those are the keys to I mean anyone who's struggled a little bit with depression or we know somebody who has SSI right. You know are the first thing that are prescribed.

And so serotonin is directly related to that. And you can create your own. No. And and through exercise. And if you can get outside and do exercise in sunlight and if you can get outside in sunlight with a friend and you're gabbing or gossiping because, gosh, women can create their own serotonin with gossip, who knew?

But that is like the trilogy of, you know, how do you have no negative side effects and only positive ones. Right? I love that. So there's even a benefit to gossip. And.

And I, I was hoping you were going to say oxytocin and it's. Yeah, you've probably heard people say this and I say it a lot, but depression is not it's not that you have a deficiency of Prozac or whatever they're prescribing.

Right. And so but it could be a deficiency of not moving your body. And leading to, to a, you know lowering. And so could you talk a little bit about oxytocin because love oxytocin I don't think it gets enough of the spotlight.

Right. Well and I think most people associate it with it's the hug. It's the cuddle. It's the holding hands or it's the dang let's go all the way and have sex hormone.

But there's also the you know, I can get oxytocin from walking with my dog. You know, and or even being with friends and being together. So it there is something about the, the virtual hug and the hand hold that you're doing together with somebody else.

Listening to music, though, that you love while you're exercising can also be a way to amplify that. And I also want to talk about the fact that a lot of women who've been exercising for decades will suddenly hit midlife and feel like exercise falls flat, that that they're not feeling it within.

And suddenly we beat ourselves up like, I'm not motivated. I guess I'm just not disciplined anymore. And the truth is, we have fewer receptors sites in our brain for dopamine, serotonin that we need to do everything possible.

So you need to have that favorite playlist ready, you know, combine music with your movement. Do it at a time of day that is really the best time of day for you.

That is not just when it's convenient. You might have to change things around a little bit, because I think that can be really important and if you look forward to it more when you're doing it with a friend or in a group, don't try to do it alone and bite the bullet and do it in your basement.

You know, find a way. How do you get yourself out so you can do it?

Oxytocin, Music, and Midlife Motivation

With people looking for ways to amplify the results of the serotonin, the dopamine, the oxytocin. Super important. I love that because as you were saying that I was thinking, I do look forward to exercising to hear my playlist like, oh, I can't wait to hear it because I'm so happy and it makes me want to move.

So I want to circle back because you talked about the timing and I just I there's some questions that I want to ask you. Do you have any advice, input, recommendations on timing, what's better or why would you do it in the morning?

And then the other question that's always asked, do I eat before I workout? Do I do a protein intake? Do I eat after? So I could just kind of give us the eating before and after answer.

And then the timing. That would be fantastic. Yes. So first of all, let's do reverse. So eating before I'm a big proponent and I always have been that we need fed exercise.

And I think if you believe in you've experienced positive results with intermittent fasting. I'm not against that. It's just do your exercise the of the in Kent nature the intense kind when you're in your fed window when you're in your eating window.

So that you are fueling for the exercise. Women can get into this. When we were you and I were in our 20s and 30s, we talked about this and it was female athlete triad.

It was women who were participating in sports that were, is statically pleasing to be thin, you know, like skating and gymnastics and running track. If you were lighter, you were probably going to perform better, was the theory, you know?

And now look at gymnasts. I mean, isn't it great that we see the muscle, we see power, we see explosiveness, and we're not worried about them falling over and fainting.

You know, like like back in the day. But we we also in that combination of exercising significantly, wanting to be thin. So we were restricting. And if women did so to the extent they lost their period, if they were of the age where they had it, that was the triad.

So the extreme exercise, the dieting or deprivation, and then the evidence was they lost their period. So it's 20 year old women were behaving or observed to be like menopausal women.

And oh my God, that was terrible at that time. Right. So now we're menopausal women. It's like, oh, it's not that bad. We're okay, we're fine. But you know, so the low energy availability is really that.

But many women in any phase, you don't necessarily have to be extreme exerciser or, you know, dieting to maintain a low body weight, to be esthetically pleasing in a sport at least, or performance.

But low energy availability simply means basically you have your foot on the gas and at the break at the same time, and you're trying to exercise hard and do things and have performances that either get you results or actually help you win.

Depending on who you are, and you're depriving yourself of the adequate fuel to do it.

Fueling Before Workouts and Timing Exercise

And so women in midlife, I'm preaching to the choir to talk to you. But to our listeners, they're experiencing more negative side effects of any kind of stress.

And we have to remember, exercise is a stressor. We control that one. It's like giving a speech. We control that. We're going to get up and give the speech, and then it's going to be over and we're going to be fine.

You know, we have a workout. We're going to hold a pose for a really long time. We're going to lift a weight that's really heavy for a minute or less, and then we're going to be fine.

We're going to put it down. But it's hard momentarily and that's appropriate. But we have these amplified stressors from all emotional stressors from any job, work life, insomnia.

We're losing sleep. You know, we did that how many times when we had young kids. And yet there's a reason you're in your 30s or 40s when you have young kids.

You don't need to be doing that when you're 60. Just saying, you know, so having a puppy at 59, not a fun thing. You know. And so we are those negative effects of stress are amplified.

And similarly, if we're not eating and we're trying to push hard in what we do, the cycle of our mentality for decades has been, you know, exercise more, eat less.

It's what we've heard. We it's we've been conditioned. It's not that we're not intelligent, it's just that we've got a lot of undoing, unwinding and unpacking and, you know, losing that in order to replace it with something better.

So we need to make sure we're fueling our system because we're anabolic resistant, meaning we are struggling to maintain muscle, let alone gain it and gain strength.

So as we become older, we become more anabolic resistant. As we're over 40 going into menopause. I wouldn't deem that as old by any reasons, but what happens is as we lose estrogen, we're more anabolic resistant because estrogen was a natural muscle stimulant or protector for us.

So now we have to pick up the slack. We need to pick up the slack from. Even if we do hormone replacement, we're we're probably not quite returning ourselves to, you know, factory standards.

Right. Let me know. We were 20. We're we're close. We're good. But you know, and you're the magician, so maybe you can do that. But yeah. We have to pick up the slack from the exercise.

So we do want that controlled stressor, but we have to give ourselves the latitude in order to do that. And we do that by feeding our body. So just to take it a little more practical, do you do you eat a steak and then head to the gym?

Made a half hour is a protein shake enough? Because I know women are wondering and we're going real power. All over the board. Yes. And so it's going to depend a little bit with you know, what time of day are you exercising, you know, and what are you able to do before.

So those of you who are rolling out of bed and you're trying to exercise right away, you know, a lot of women I hear from say, I can't stomach something right before I eat yet, but even if you can have a little cream coconut cream in your coffee, you haven't had something with protein, but you have had some calories at the very least.

So you've broken your fast, you fueled yourself a little bit. And to that woman, I would say, as soon as you're done working out, have a meal right away.

Because overnight fasting, you know, you are in a more anabolic state going into a workout. A workout is a muscle breakdown. Also, we need to make sure we now start to repair and rebuild right away if you can wait a little bit longer.

So my personal habit I'm able to get up. I work at home, I'm working for a few hours and during that I'll have a little lighter breakfast. It might be a smoothie and it might be egg whites with some vegetables in that.

And then maybe an hour later. So in both cases those are light meals. So they're going to digest really easily. Not so you stuck in your gut. So you're not going to feel heavy and bogged down.

But then I'll go for a workout and again then I'm having a real good solid meal after that. And you know, a lot of times it's a brunch or lunch time for me.

So depending on how you feel, if you've got two hours between when you'll eat and that workout, you can have a full meal. Your body has time to clear that out of the gut.

It's not going to weigh you down, but the closer you get, the less you have. Perfect. Okay, I think. Yeah. It's there. Yeah, you heard it here. Now, that misconception that we all have, now we know what we need to do because I know like when I do hot yoga, I once made the mistake of having I had, like, this gluten free, dairy free lasagna.

This was like early to so many years ago, early in my practice. And then like a half hour later went to hot yoga. And they're like specifically like don't eat, you know, three hours before two hours, 2 to 3 hours.

You should not be eating. And sure enough, it was the only time I had to leave the hot yoga room. I was puking in the hot yoga studio bathroom. Oh, shoot.

Lesson learned. So. But you know, we're talking about if you're going to go lift weights or you're going for a hike or something like that. So say that like bacon, potatoes for after, but fuel before, I love them.

I love the idea of even if you can eat, just get some coconut in just to get some calories. And so what I also hear you saying is don't wake up, don't exercise on an empty stomach without having fueled yourself at all.

Yes, right. Put some calories in. What you're doing is like you're igniting a spark to start things burning. So I think we get in our heads, we're going to be pristine.

I haven't eaten anything. Then I'm going to burn more. So I'm burning fat. But the problem is you actually don't burn calories at it as fast a rate, so you may be burning a higher percentage of that, but you're burning it so much slower

that in in terms of the math and the way it really works, if you're working in burning calories at a higher rate, even if the start came from ingesting carbohydrates like half a banana in a smear of nut butter on it, you're getting that burn and you're burning more calories.

And still, you know, a percent of a much bigger number is still a bigger number. So you will you will come back to getting the fat burn. You want to if you're able to work as hard at as you at your optimal capacity.

And is there a difference or a more beneficial time to exercise? Is it something you don't want to do after the sun God. I'm so glad you asked that. So yeah.

So what, what I like to have people remember is intense early and light late. And and light is relative. So I would say you know you just asked and talked about hot yoga.

You know I mean the heat. Yeah.

Best Exercise Types for Mood and Anxiety

Definitely makes that intense. And I'd been in there I mean I saw nail polish melt off my fingernails. That's intense. That's that's wrong as what that is.

But you know that you may be okay to do later in the day. You have to test for yourself. It's not jostling to the gut. It's not tearing down of the muscle.

So much so it it is definitely a different thing. And we should talk about the mind body. You know, part of yoga is it is one of the best things, you know, when related to depression and to anxiety, to improving just cognitive function.

For those of you who are suffering from brain fog, it's better than any of the other. Just looking at stretching, looking at aerobic activity, looking at strength training.

It it outshines all of the rest of the options when it comes to helping you decrease anxiety and depression. And that said, it's a stand out among a family that all of them will do you some good with anxiety and depression.

But if you really want to tap into the one mind body seems to be it. And so are there, I guess. What do I want to ask is weight lifting is beneficial to relieve anxiety, depression as going for a hike or getting on a treadmill or going to yoga, doing Pilates.

Is there a hierarchy of what you should focus on? Yeah, that's such a great question, and I think we have to say the answer that really irks a lot of people.

It depends. You know, I think in part you've got to know yourself. So I would say if you were asking hiking or getting on a treadmill, I would say, if you can get outside, you're going to get that double benefit.

So we know that forest bathing, being out in nature, whether you're moving or not moving is better. But there are studies that have been done, say, in New York City, you know, walking on pavement, you know, versus walking in Central Park in the green, you know, versus not at all, you know.

And the hands down winner was walking in the park among green. You know, seeing green much more beneficial as far as cortisol levels came, came further down.

So that's going to be much more important. However, you know, what I've noticed is in getting someone started with exercise, if it was anxiety, strength training seems to actually be easier to adopt and start.

And I would think this is because many of the reactions for cardiovascular exercise almost mimic anxiety. Right? And so you bring it on and you're actually feeling a low level of anxiety while you're doing that exercise that is supposed to help.

So how do you get through the other side? Whereas strength training is again, you're just, you know, 45 seconds or a minute and it's a controlled environment.

You're exhaling and expiring on the way out and coming back and it stays very even. It is less stressful and disruptive in terms of, you know, chaotic for your heart, your breathlessness.

I think it's easier. So anxiety and resistance training seem to go really well. And that's anecdotally as well as you know, there's no real research to say, you know, strength training as a stand out for anxiety.

There is definitely research showing there's a correlation between it being very beneficial. But I think it is easier to adopt because it doesn't get you breathless and and comfortable in the same way.

And I never thought of that. But that makes a ton of sense. So, so I have two questions going around my brain. So I want to ask the first one for for women listening.

If you've never weighed trained, what do you. I'm always nervous. Like, you listen to us talk and then someone runs out and just starts lifting weights.

So what are do they need? Like, do you have a video online? Do they need to get a trainer? How do they do it to make sure they're doing it safely and not injuring themselves.

And that oh, I see a puppy in the back. We've been photobombed. Yes, yes. And so, you know, just some safety like the, the ABCs of how do I start weight training and no, I'm doing the right thing, not overdoing it, not under doing it and protecting so I don't injure myself.

Yeah, it's such a great question. So first of all, on any given day, just about you can go to flipping 50.com. And we do have a five day flip. And in the in that you not only see you know, how would I lay out five days conscious of let's work but let's recover.

Let's do them in short 20 minute maybe workouts. You'll see two strength training sessions. The important piece is when you're a beginner, if you prefer the privacy of your own home.

Okay, great, but I have someone who will say, you know, where does my weight need to be? Put your weight on your heels. Toes are down, but they're not holding a lot of your weight.

You should feel it in your bum, not in your knees. You should have an arch to your back, not be rounded in the back. So somebody who will go through those details, I will.

Okay? So much. You'll be tired of me by the time I'm done. But that is a good thing when you're learning, going slowly, hearing it again, hearing the repetition, hearing.

Drop those shoulders down. Get them out of your ears. And I only know because I know, right? Because I feel it too. And you know, having instruction is really important.

And if you're going to the gym, one area that people are likely to make is simply following and watching what somebody else did.

Starting Strength Training Safely

Don't do that. Go and go and work with a trainer or seek if you need it, a medical exercise specialist. If you've got osteoporosis, osteopenia, fibromyalgia, you've got arthritis, something you're worried about.

Seek out somebody who's got experience with that, who can tell you these things to do these things not to do. And yes, you put your feet here, but here's where on the plate you put them.

You know, there's there are nuances that will help you both be more effective, but also avoid the aches and pains that don't have to come with exercise.

Right? Yeah. I'm always cautious about that. Like you want it to be a good experience. And if you work, I think if you get a trainer, it's not like you have to be tied to them forever just to have them get you set up in a good, so you're not going to injure yourself, and then you have a bad experience, and then you don't want to exercise.

And then the other question do you find that it's a home run 100% of the time? Exercise will always relieve anxiety, depression, or there are are there people who are resistant?

It doesn't. But that is. A great question. Yeah. And so I want to say twofold. I'm going to I'm going to counter my answer here on purpose. But I would say there's no non-responders.

And I would say there's no exercise that is not going to help you. You know, and, and especially think that in this case, if you're dealing with depression or you're dealing with anxiety specifically, whether it's situational or otherwise, if you're called to do it, it is probably going to benefit you.

Self-selected exercise probably is not said enough. We're right now we're dictating a lot because we're talking about if you are in midlife, we want to focus on muscle, we want to focus on bone density and brain health.

And and for a lot of us, we're not saying it, but we want to focus on body composition. We want to decrease some fat that we've not been able to prevent coming on, but I think, you know, in giving you this is the exercise prescription that you need to be doing here for that, we missed the we first have to make it a habit.

We first need to be wanting to do it. We need it to feel better the days we do it than the days we miss it. And we've got to get there first. So self-selected exercise is something that we're not saying enough about.

For those of you who are just starting and if you are significantly overweight. So if you are a larger size person, you're potentially not responding the same way to intense exercise as someone who might be smaller or leaner.

So it's really important whether you're a health coach or a trainer, by the way, if you're listening, pay attention to this. We don't want to impose on somebody a speed or intensity or resistance that is beyond that point where they will feel good because they won't necessarily have the same endorphin.

Those neurotransmitters will not be released the same way. So self-selected exercise. So you are comfortable, you feel in control can be very important to taking that first step of just that's your first workout, but there's going to be a second date that's really important.

It's a long it's a committed relationship. That's right. And like weightlifting, yoga, hiking. But you could also be when you say self-selected, I'm thinking hula hooping or roller.

So there's lots of it. Could be I don't I haven't done it yet. But pickleball is a big one, right? Right. So mixing it up is a good idea. I think mixing it up is a great idea.

And I think, you know, just like if you were exposing a child, you know, wouldn't take them and take them to soccer at four and say, okay, that's it. Soccer is your sport.

You know, we we take them to golf lessons in swimming lessons and teach them how to ride a bike and give them exposure to all kinds of things. They can find what they do love, but also just get comfortable moving their body in so many different ways to open up the world.

And I think we need to get back to a little bit of that and make it like child's play. You know, what else could I do and get a friend, you know, and go take a pickleball lesson.

You know, if you've never done that and you may decide you never want to go back, but at least you can say

you've tried it, you may fall in love with it.

Yeah, I think it's really good. I think in everything it's good to know thyself. But especially when it comes to exercise, for me personally. I'm more of a lone wolf exerciser because I like to exercise when I can get it in.

In my day. And I know, oh, I have a I have a gap here. And so to have to plan with someone puts a little more pressure on me. I rather just my my mountain is a three minute car drive and I go, oh, there's a gap going now.

And so and I also know I'm very good about showing up for classes.

Finding the Right Exercise Fit

I got but tell me to do something at home on my own or, that I'm just not going to do it. So I think it's good to know. Right. And some people would be the total opposite.

They need that friend. They need to know 10:00 a meet and Joan and we're going or watching my video. And so they're all good. You just need to really get honest with yourself.

Right about this is what I'm going to do, and this is what I'm going to enjoy. Yeah, exactly. And it's a marriage right along. There is no divorce here from exercise.

So that's that's. Right. Yeah. And so the point is, you know, if you want some help or your support, you know, an accountability partner is great, but your programs don't have to look at all the same.

It's like, what did you do. What and how did you enjoy it. You know that's I think the key. Yeah I was I was just talking to a friend. We're talking about going live on social media.

And I said we should be accountability partners because if I have someone to account to, I will do it. And so accountability and exercise is a I love that you said that.

Right. It could be totally different, but just that, you know, you got to show up and say, yeah, I did it. I'm a woman. It's good to be a woman of our word.

It's good to do what we say, because I think that also builds neurotransmitters and neural connections. If we don't do what we say, it can lead to being more depressed because then we eat ourselves up.

But when we do it, we're like, yeah, I did it. Yeah, I'm up. I got this accomplishment mastery. Yeah, absolutely. And so any last words of wisdom, that you want to share about exercise, about how it relates to anxiety, depression, any last minute tidbits that we do?

I think I think the biggest one is, you know, a quote, you know, a client of mine said this once and she said it spontaneously, and I'm like, I could have written that better.

You know, she said, I don't care what the question is. The answer is exercise. So if it's mood, you want a you need a mood boost. You, need to clearly think better.

You need some creative. You need a break. You need to purge some adrenaline, you know, from a conversation maybe that you should never have. You know, you just need to go for the walk.

But very few people will ever come back from some exercise. Whether it's two minutes, five minutes or it's 30 minute saying, I wish I hadn't done that, almost never.

Does that happen. Yeah, that's such a good I love that whatever the whatever the question, the answer is exercise. And it's so true. I, I haven't said it that eloquently, but I always say, if you're in a heated thing or you're about to say something, you may like go exercise because it just fits everything and then you can come back a little more sane

and a little more balanced and have a little more connected conversation.

So you heard it, ladies. Whatever the question, the answer is exercise. And that's like a great one to have post-it notes, bumper stickers. Yes, absolutely.

And you can wear. I love that. I think I always say not all medicine comes in a pill bottle. Yeah. And good. And in that I put exercise wise and sleep and meditation.

And so it is such a, such a pillar and often we, we say it but then we don't do it. So I hope today really inspired you to, to get married, to exercise.

So where can the listeners learn more about you? Okay. We are at flipping 50.com, so all words spelled out and on social media we primarily do Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

But we're at flipping five zero TV as in television. Did I date myself flipping 52? And you get to see her cutest puppy Moses. Yeah, I'm like, My God, doggy, wait.

You got a. Dog? Yeah. And so and she's always doing great stuff, so be sure to follow her and check her, check out her five day. That's a great way to get started.

If you're sitting or going, where do I begin now you have a great resource. So thank you so much for being here and just bringing an important piece. It's so important to me.

We we tend to because we think like we've been trained and we think, I need something out there. I need to take something to feel better. And don't get me wrong, I have helped more women that I can count over the 23 years to be less depressed, to have less anxiety.

Whether it's giving processed around or estrogen or oxytocin or thyroid or adrenal support. And so those things are important. But they're coupled. They're coupled with exercise.

You don't do one and not the other. You do them together. So and sometimes it's easier to just want to take something. The exercise we have to put a little more effort into.

But I hope as you heard our very special guests today, you understand that it's worth the extra effort and you will feel the difference. So get out there, grab your accountability partner if you need one and start start moving your body.

So thank you so much Deb, for being here. Thank you everyone for joining us for this super important conversation. And we will be back with more.