



Mental Health and Exercise

Much has been said about the physical health benefits of swimming, and more and more is being said about mental health. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in four adults suffers from a mental health disorder in a given year in the United States. Some of the more common types of mental illnesses are anxiety disorders like post traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

While most people feel depressed, sad or anxious at certain times, people who suffer from mental illness fall into intense cycles of stress during which negative thoughts or obsessions are compounded, making it difficult to function and live a normal life. High stress caused by mental health disorders can also lead to cardiovascular disease. According to the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, women are twice as likely to develop an anxiety disorder and suffer from depression as men.

The ADAA maintains that, "Exercise may improve mental health by helping the brain cope better with stress." Furthermore, researchers have found that people who did regular vig-

orous exercise were "25 percent less likely to develop depression or an anxiety disorder over the next five years."

Some of the symptoms associated with anxiety disorders include muscular tension, fast heartbeat, irritability, and loss of concentration and sleep. It is well documented that exercise helps reduce most of these symptoms, but a recent study by the University of Missouri found that high-intensity exercise is better for reducing stress and anxiety. The study also found that high-intensity exercise particularly benefits women.

Masters swimmer **Kristin Burgard** was diagnosed with postpartum OCD after the birth of her first daughter. She found that swimming six days a week helped her overcome her symptoms. The support of her teammates and friends, and the reduced stress from swimming workouts, helped her regain control of her life.

"Swimming gave me a break from the terrifying thoughts floating around my brain," Burgard says.

As with many mental illnesses, the symptoms of post-partum OCD are confusing and scary. Distressing thoughts spiral out of control and end up limiting the ability of the new mother to take control and care for herself, her newborn baby and her family.

In a study conducted by Arizona State University, "The Influence of Exercise on Mental Health," author Daniel M. Landers writes, "Exercise is related not only to a relief in symptoms of depression and anxiety but it also seems to be beneficial in enhancing self-esteem, producing more restful sleep, and helping people recover more quickly from psychosocial stressors."

While stress or anxiety symptoms relieved though exercise are usually temporary, like taking an aspirin for pain, the combination of regular exercise and medication for some people can have long lasting effects in reducing symptoms. <<<

Burgard shares her personal account of living with OCD, and how swimming helped her manage her condition, in a feature article on the home page of usms.org this month.

running and walking for mature swimmers," she says.

The study suggests that because of the high level of pain and disability found in all age level swimmers, exposure guidelines and symptom prevention programs should be developed. The data also suggests that further study should be done in defining optimal yardage and swimming practice times for each age group. Cross training, core endurance training and pectoral stretching should also be studied.

The study was done over two years and required five Arcadia University physical

therapy graduate students. The group travelled to over 20 teams in the Philadelphia and surrounding area to test swimmers.

"We are extremely grateful to U.S. Masters Swimming for providing the opportunity to perform this research and disseminate our studies' findings so that all swimmers may benefit and further research may be undertaken," Tate says.

Tate and her physical therapy students at Arcadia University traveled 80 miles from the Philadelphia area to New Jersey to study the Ocean City Masters Team.

"This team has an awesome coach,

Bruckner Chase, and I met so many enthusiastic and motivated swimmers on this team that I eventually joined it," she says.

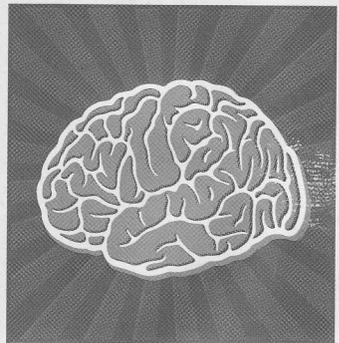
Because the study suggests that dryland training programs may affect shoulder symptoms in swimmers, Tate is in the process of designing a study to investigate these programs.

"I'm looking for coaches of swimmers of all ages to complete a short survey," Tate says.

Coaches and teams will not be personally identified. Coaches who would like to participate in the study may email Angela Tate, tatea@arcadia.edu. <<<



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Train Your Brain

Minnesota Masters swimmer Nancy Kryka has provided another great crossword puzzle for this issue. Download this issue's puzzle at usmswimmer.com. Kryka has also published a book of crossword puzzles, which is available at lulu.com/product/6120758.

