

## University of Dundee

### Exercise for depression

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# Exercise for depression (Review)

Mead GE, Morley W, Campbell P, Greig CA, McMurdo M, Lawlor DA



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Exercise for depression (Review)

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[Intervention Review]

## Exercise for depression

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Depression is a common and important cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. Depression is commonly treated with antidepressants and/or psychotherapy, but some people may prefer alternative approaches such as exercise. There are a number of theoretical reasons why exercise may improve depression.

#### Objectives

To determine the effectiveness of exercise in the treatment of depression.

#### Search methods

We searched Medline, Embase, Sports Discus, PsycINFO, the Cochrane Controlled Trials Register, and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews for eligible studies in March 2007. In addition, we hand-searched several relevant journals, contacted experts in the field, searched bibliographies of retrieved articles, and performed citation searches of identified studies. We also searched [www.controlled-trials.com](http://www.controlled-trials.com) in May 2008.

#### Selection criteria

Randomised controlled trials in which exercise was compared to standard treatment, no treatment or a placebo treatment in adults (aged 18 and over) with depression, as defined by trial authors. We excluded trials of post-natal depression.

#### Data collection and analysis

We calculated effect sizes for each trial using Cohen's method and a standardised mean difference (SMD) for the overall pooled effect, using a random effects model. Where trials used a number of different tools to assess depression, we included the main outcome measure only in the meta-analysis.

## Main results

Twenty-eight trials fulfilled our inclusion criteria, of which 25 provided data for meta-analyses. Randomisation was adequately concealed in a minority of studies, most did not use intention to treat analyses and most used self-reported symptoms as outcome measures. For the 23 trials (907 participants) comparing exercise with no treatment or a control intervention, the pooled SMD was -0.82 (95% CI -1.12, -0.51), indicating a large clinical effect. However, when we included only the three trials with adequate allocation concealment and intention to treat analysis and blinded outcome assessment, the pooled SMD was -0.42 (95% CI -0.88, 0.03) i.e. moderate, non-significant effect. The effect of exercise was not significantly different from that of cognitive therapy. There was insufficient data to determine risks and costs.

## Authors' conclusions

Exercise seems to improve depressive symptoms in people with a diagnosis of depression, but when only methodologically robust trials are included, the effect sizes are only moderate and not statistically significant. Further, more methodologically robust trials should be performed to obtain more accurate estimates of effect sizes, and to determine risks and costs. Further systematic reviews could be performed to investigate the effect of exercise in people with dysthymia who do not fulfil diagnostic criteria for depression.

## PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

### Exercise for depression

Depression is a common and important illness affecting at least 1 in 5 people during their lifetime. Exercise has been advocated as an adjunct to usual treatment. This review identified all available randomised trials which compared exercise with either no treatment or an established treatment (e.g. talking therapy) for people with a clinical diagnosis of depression. Data from 25 trials were combined. We found exercise did seem to improve the symptoms of depression, but we cannot be sure exactly how effective it is, or the most effective type of exercise. The evidence suggests that exercise probably needs to be continued in the longer-term for benefits on mood to be maintained.

## BACKGROUND

### Description of condition

Depression refers to a wide range of mental health problems characterised by the absence of a positive affect (a loss of interest and enjoyment in ordinary things and experiences), low mood and a range of associated emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural symptoms (NICE 2007). Depression is common, affecting 121 million people worldwide (Moussavi 2007). Depression is an important cause of morbidity and mortality and produces the greatest decrement in health compared with other chronic diseases such as angina or arthritis (Moussavi 2007).

### Description of intervention

Depression is commonly treated with antidepressants or psychological therapies or a combination of both. However, a recent Cochrane review (Moncrieff 2003) found only small differences between antidepressant medications and active placebos. Furthermore, antidepressants may have adverse side effects, adherence can be poor, and there is a lag time between starting antidepressants

and improvements in mood. Psychological treatments are generally free from side effects, but some people may not wish to attend psychotherapy because of perceived stigma. Depression is a well-recognised reason for seeking alternative therapies (Astin 1998). Whilst this may reflect dissatisfaction with conventional treatments, another possibility is that alternative therapies may be more in line with people's own beliefs and philosophies (Astin 1998). There has been increasing interest in the potential role of alternative therapies such as music therapy, light therapy, acupuncture, family therapy, marital therapy, relaxation and exercise for the management of depression.

The effect of exercise on depression has been the subject of research for several decades and is believed by a number of researchers and clinicians to be effective in the treatment of depression (Beesley 1997). For example, a report for the National Service Framework for Mental Health suggested that exercise should be included as a treatment option for people with depression (Donaghy 2000). The recent UK National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE)

guideline for depression recommended structured, supervised exercise programmes, three times a week (45 minutes to 1 hour) for 10 to 12 weeks for mild depression (NICE 2007). This recommendation was graded 'C' i.e. expert committee reports, or opinions and/or clinical experience of respected authorities. Exercise programmes can be offered in the UK through Exercise Referral Systems (DOH 2001). These schemes direct someone to a service offering an assessment of need, development of a tailored physical activity programme, monitoring of progress and follow-up. However, a recent systematic review of Exercise on Prescription Schemes found limited evidence about their effectiveness and recommended further research (Sorensen 2006). NICE (NICE 2006) concluded that there was insufficient evidence to recommend Exercise Referral Schemes other than as part of research studies to evaluate their effectiveness.

### How the intervention might work

There is evidence from population studies that depression is related to low levels of physical activity (Biddle 2000; Goodwin 2003). Whilst an association between two variables does not necessarily imply causality, there are plausible reasons why physical activity and exercise may improve mood. Exercise may act as a diversion from negative thoughts, and the mastery of a new skill may be important (LePore 1997). Social contact may be part of the mechanism. Physical activity may have physiological effects such as changes in endorphin and monoamine levels, or reduction in the levels of the stress hormone cortisol (Duclos 2003) which all may improve mood. Recent studies have suggested that exercise stimulated growth of new nerve cells and release of proteins known to improve health and survival of nerve cells, e.g. brain-derived growth neurotrophic factor (Cotman 2002; Ernst 2005).

### Why it is important to do this review

Several meta-analyses (Craft 1998; Carlson 1991; North 1990; Lawlor 2001; Stathopoulou 2006; Sjosten 2006) have looked at the effect of exercise on depression and all found that exercise was of benefit. However, three of these reviews pooled data from a range of study types that included uncontrolled studies and randomised as well as non-randomised controlled trials, and pooled data from trials that compared exercise and no treatment with data from trials that compared exercise and other forms of treatment (Craft 1998; Carlson 1991; North 1990). One included only trials in older people (Sjosten 2006). One meta-analysis (Stathopoulou 2006) included only publications from peer-reviewed journals even though it is widely acknowledged that positive trials are more likely to be published than negative or inconclusive trials. The Cochrane Handbook recommends comprehensive searching for all trials, including unpublished ones, to avoid bias. Two meta-analyses which included assessments of study quality both cautiously concluded that exercise may be effective, but recommended that further well-designed trials are required (Sjosten 2006; Lawlor 2001).

We have become aware that further randomised trials have

been published since these systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Hence, another systematic review, which includes these new trials and which seeks to determine the effect of study quality on the effectiveness of exercise, is now required.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the effectiveness of exercise in the treatment of depression.
2. To update a previously published systematic review in this area (Lawlor 2001).

## METHODS

### Criteria for considering studies for this review

#### Types of studies

Randomised controlled trials. A trial was defined as a randomised controlled trial if the allocation of participants to intervention and comparison groups is described as randomised (including terms such as "randomly", "random", and "randomisation").

#### Types of participants

Adult men and women aged 18 and over (with no upper age limit). Studies were included if the participants were defined by the author of the trial as having depression (by any method of diagnosis and with any severity of depression). The effects of exercise on depressive symptoms in participants with emotional distress (but not fulfilling a diagnosis of depression) or those who are healthy were not included in this review.

Studies that investigated the effect of exercise on anxiety and neurotic disorders were not included in the review.

We made a post-hoc decision to exclude trials of exercise for post-natal depression, because a separate Cochrane Review will address this particular question (Glyde, protocol in progress).

#### Types of interventions

Studies comparing any type of exercise (as defined by the trial authors) with no treatment/waitlist/placebo or to any other type of intervention (including pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy or alternative interventions).

Studies comparing exercise plus another intervention versus the other intervention alone were also included (e.g. exercise plus cognitive therapy versus cognitive therapy alone).

Studies comparing two different types of exercise with no non-exercising comparison group were not included.

Studies that measured outcomes immediately before and after a single exercise session were not included.

#### **Post-hoc decisions about intervention and comparisons**

When the protocol for this review was first published in the Cochrane Library, we did not expect to identify trials described as 'combination treatments' by the authors, where exercise was one component of the 'combination'. Hence we made a post-hoc decision to exclude such trials, because it would not have been possible to disentangle the effect of exercise from the effect of the other components of the intervention. Following editorial assessment of our review, we excluded a trial which provided an exercise intervention lasting only four days (Berlin 2003).

#### **Choice of comparisons for meta-analysis**

Where trials included a control arm, an exercise arm, and an 'established treatment' (e.g. CBT, antidepressants) arm, we extracted data on control versus exercise, and exercise versus established treatment (e.g. CBT, antidepressants). This meant that data from the exercise arm were included in two separate comparisons.

Where trials compared an established treatment (e.g. CBT, antidepressants) versus exercise versus both the established treatment and exercise, we made two comparisons: established treatment (e.g. CBT, antidepressants) plus exercise versus established treatment (e.g. CBT, antidepressants) alone (and included this in the meta-analysis of treatment versus control); and we also compared exercise versus established treatment (e.g. CBT, antidepressants). This means that data from the 'established treatment alone' arm were used in two separate comparisons.

#### **Main comparisons**

Two main analyses were undertaken:

1. Exercise was compared to "no treatment". This included studies in which exercise was compared to no intervention; those in which it was compared to an intervention which the authors defined as a placebo; and those in which exercise was used as an adjunct to an established treatment which was received (in an identical way) by participants in both the exercising and non-exercising group e.g. exercise plus CBT versus CBT alone
2. Exercise was compared to other treatments for depression, including cognitive therapy, 'bright light' therapy and antidepressants.

#### **Types of outcome measures**

##### **Primary outcome measures**

Studies had to include a measure of depression or mood at the outcome assessment, either as a continuous measure or as a dichotomous outcome.

Where trials used a number of different tools to assess depression we included the main outcome measure only in the meta-analysis. The main outcome measure was defined using a hierarchy of criterion as follows - identified by the trial authors as the main outcome measure, outcome reported in the abstract, first outcome reported in the results section.

Where trials used dichotomous outcomes as primary outcomes; and also provided data on continuous outcome measures, we used the data provided in the trial reports for the continuous outcome measure in our meta-analysis.

#### **Secondary outcome measures**

Following editorial review, we decided to extract data, when available, on the number of people who were screened for inclusion, the number recruited, attendance at the exercise interventions, and the number completing the interventions, in order to better understand the practical considerations of exercise trials for depression, and for the provision of exercise as a treatment for depression.

We recorded whether trials reported other clinically relevant endpoints (e.g. quality of life), cost and adverse events.

#### **Search methods for identification of studies**

1. Original search strategy (Lawlor 2001)

a) We searched Medline on Ovid, Embase on Ovid, Psycinfo on Silver Platter, Sports Discus on Silver Platter, the Cochrane Controlled Trials Register and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. Details of the search strategy used in Medline are provided below; this was modified as appropriate for other databases. Appropriate filters were applied to identify randomised controlled trials (Dickersin 1994, Lefebvre 1996).

b) We handsearched the following: BMJ, JAMA, Archives of Internal Medicine, New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, Comprehensive Psychiatry, British Journal of Psychiatry, Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica and British Journal of Sports Medicine.

c) We searched the bibliographies of all retrieved articles for additional references.

d) We contacted experts - all authors of the studies included in the review and those with at least two publications amongst those that were excluded but that were related to the study area - to identify unpublished studies and ongoing studies where results may become available before the end of the review.

Medline Search Strategy:

1. exp EXERCISE/
2. exp Exercise Therapy/
3. exp Exertion/
4. exp Physical Fitness/
5. exp Walking/
6. exp Running/
7. exp Swimming/
8. exp Jogging/
9. exp "Physical Education and Training"/
10. exercise\$ near aerobic\$.tw.
11. train\$ near aerobic\$.tw.
12. exercise\$ near strength\$.tw.
13. train\$ near strength\$.tw.
14. bicycling\$.tw.

15. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14
16. exp DEPRESSION/
17. exp Depressive Disorder/
18. exp Dysthymic Disorder/
19. 16 or 17 or 18  
20 15 and 19
2. To supplement and update the original searches, we undertook the following:
- a) Electronic searches (performed on 26.3.07)  
CCDANCTR-Studies were searched using the following terms: Diagnosis = Depression or Depressive Disorder or Dysthymic Disorder and Intervention = Exercise.  
Cochrane Central Controlled Trials Register (CENTRAL) was searched using the following terms: Exercis\*  
Following editorial review, we also searched www.controlled-trials.com (on 20.5.08) to identify ongoing trials  
All the selected studies and relevant review articles were sought as citations in the Scisearch on 25.5.07. Potentially relevant articles were obtained and scrutinised for relevance.
- b) Handsearches
- a/ The references of all selected trials, systematic reviews and non-systematic reviews were inspected for more published reports and citations of unpublished research. These handsearches were performed during May 2007.
- c) Personal communication
- a/ To ensure all RCTs were identified, the authors of significant papers and other experts in the field were contacted to enquire about published, unpublished or ongoing trials. This was done during May and June 2007.

## Data collection and analysis

### Selection of studies

For the first version of the review (Lawlor 2001), three reviewers examined titles and abstracts to remove obviously irrelevant reports. Studies needed to be identified by only one reviewer for the full text to be retrieved. Two reviewers then examined full text reports to determine compliance of studies with eligibility criteria and corresponded with investigators where appropriate to clarify study eligibility.

For the current updated version of the review, one reviewer (Gillian Mead) examined titles and abstracts from the electronic searches, retrieved full-texts of new, potentially relevant papers, and discussed eligibility with a second reviewer (Wendy Morley). Gillian Mead corresponded with investigators, where appropriate, to clarify study eligibility. Gillian Mead and Wendy Morley made final decisions on study inclusion and proceeded to data collection.

### Data collection and management

Two reviewers (Debbie Lawlor and Stephen Hopker) extracted data for the first review in 2001 (Lawlor 2001). Two reviewers (Gillian Mead and Wendy Morley) independently extracted data

for each new trial identified for this review. Data extracted were: quality criteria, participants, interventions, outcome measures, results and main conclusions. All four reviewers used the same structured form that had been piloted on two studies. Any discrepancies were resolved by referring to the original papers and discussion. Following editorial assessment of the updated review, one reviewer (Gillian Mead) scrutinised the publications again and extracted data (when available) on the number of patients screened, the number randomised, the number allocated exercise, the number who dropped out of the exercise arm (please see additional table), secondary clinical outcomes, cost and adverse events. We found current contact details of all authors through correspondence addresses on study reports and by searching websites. We contacted all authors by email or post (sending three reminders to non-responders), to establish missing details in the methods and results sections of the written reports and to determine authors' knowledge of, or involvement in, any current work in the area. On the envelopes we put return address details and a request to inform us if the addressee was no longer at that address.

### Assessment of study quality

Two reviewers (Debbie Lawlor and Stephen Hopker) assessed the quality of the trials included in the first review (Lawlor 2001). Two reviewers (Gillian Mead and Wendy Morley) assessed the quality of new trials identified for this update. We recorded whether allocation was concealed, whether intention to treat analysis was undertaken, and whether there was blinding of outcome assessor (Schulz 1995). For concealment of allocation we distinguished between trials that were adequately concealed (central randomisation at a site remote from the study; computerised allocation in which records are in a locked, unreadable file that can be assessed only after entering patient details; the drawing of non-opaque envelopes), inadequately concealed (open list or tables of random numbers; open computer systems; drawing of non-opaque envelopes) and unclear (no information in report, and the authors either did not respond to requests for information or were unable to provide information).

There are two separate aspects of 'intention to treat' analyses. First, there is the issue of whether participants were analysed according to original treatment assignment, regardless of whether they participated in the allocated treatment. The second issue concerns missing outcome data. If trials only included data from participants who completed the trial i.e. 'available cases' and did not attempt to deal with missing outcome data by using a recognised statistical method, e.g. imputing using last observation carried forward (LOCF), we also defined as 'not intention to treat'. Hence, trials could only be defined as 'intention to treat' if participants were analysed according to the allocated treatment AND if all participants either completed allocated treatments or if missing outcome data were replaced using a recognised statistical method e.g. LOCF. When information could not be obtained either from the publication or from the authors, we classified the trial as 'not intention to treat'.

For blinding we distinguished between trials in which the main outcome was measured by an assessor who was blind to treatment allocation (blind) and those in which the main outcome was measured either by the participants themselves or by a non-blinded assessor (not blind).

#### Measures of treatment effect

We undertook a narrative review of all studies and a meta-analysis of those studies with appropriate data. To include data from as many trials as possible we calculated effect sizes for each trial using Cohen's method (Rosenthal 1994) and a standardised mean difference (SMD) for the overall pooled effect. Where trials used a number of different tools to assess depression we included the main outcome measure only in the meta-analysis. The main outcome measure was defined using a hierarchy of criterion as follows - identified by the authors as the main outcome measure, outcome reported in the abstract, first outcome reported in the results section.

We interpreted the SMDs using the following 'rule of thumb': 0.2 represents a small effect, 0.5 a moderate effect, and 0.8 a large effect (Cohen 1988).

We pooled long-term follow-up data from those trials that reassessed patients long after the interventions had been completed.

#### Unit of analysis issues

Where trials had more than two arms (e.g. exercise, other active treatment, control), we used data from the exercise arm for two separate comparisons: exercise versus other active treatment and exercise versus control.

If there were more than one intensity of exercise in a trial, we chose the exercise arm with the greatest clinical effect.

#### Data synthesis

We used a random effects model based on DerSimonian and Laird's method to calculate the pooled effect size (DerSimonian 1986).

#### Assessment of heterogeneity

We used the  $\text{Chi}^2$  statistic, together with the  $I^2$  statistic, to assess heterogeneity.

#### Investigation of heterogeneity and subgroup analyses

1. We explored the effect of different types of exercise (aerobic, resistance exercise or mixed aerobic and resistance) on outcome.
2. In future updates of the review we plan to explore the effect of the duration of the intervention by categorising studies in the main comparisons by length of intervention.

We will also consider performing additional subgroup analyses according to the following criteria: supervised vs unsupervised, indoor vs outdoor and individual vs group.

#### Sensitivity analyses

We undertook sensitivity analyses to explore how much of the variation between studies comparing exercise to no exercise is explained by between study differences in:

1. publication type (peer reviewed journal, conference abstract/proceedings, doctoral dissertation)
2. allocation concealment
3. intention to treat analysis

4. blinding.

## RESULTS

### Description of studies

See: [Characteristics of included studies](#); [Characteristics of excluded studies](#); [Characteristics of ongoing studies](#).

#### Results of the search

Of the 144 potentially relevant papers retrieved for scrutinisation, we excluded 116 studies. Reasons for exclusion are given in Characteristics of Excluded studies. Amongst these 116 excluded studies, there were 67 papers describing clinical trials. Reasons for excluding these 67 papers are also summarised in more detail below.

#### Included studies

A total of 28 trials fulfilled our criteria, of which 14 had already been identified in 2001 (Lawlor 2001). Of the 28 trials, 17 were from US (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; DOSE 2002; Doyne 1987; Epstein 1986; Greist 1979; Hess-Homeier 1981; McCann 1984; Vickers 2005; Fremont 1987; Klein 1985; Reuter 1984; Setaro 1985; Orth 1979; Fetsch 1979; Bonnet 2005; Singh 1997). One was from Canada (McNeil 1991), three from the UK (Mather 2001; Mutrie 1988; Veale 1992), one from Australia (Singh 2005), two from Hong Kong (Chou 2004; Tsang 2006), one from Norway (Martinsen 1985), one from Germany (Knuppen 2007), one from Russia (Pinchasov 2000) and one from Thailand (Nabkasorn 2005).

Of these 28 trials, 19 were peer reviewed papers (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; Chou 2004; DOSE 2002; Doyne 1987; Fremont 1987; Greist 1979; Klein 1985; Knuppen 2007; Martinsen 1985; Mather 2001; McCann 1984; McNeil 1991; Nabkasorn 2005; Pinchasov 2000; Singh 1997; Singh 2005; Tsang 2006; Veale 1992); six were doctoral dissertations (Bonnet 2005; Epstein 1986; Fetsch 1979; Hess-Homeier 1981; Setaro 1985; Orth 1979) and three were published in abstract form only (Mutrie 1988; Reuter 1984; Vickers 2005).

Of these 28 trials, data from two studies were unsuitable for statistical pooling (McCann 1984; Greist 1979). Preliminary information published in abstract form is also included in the systematic review but data are not currently available for meta-analysis, but may be available for future versions of the review (Vickers 2005). One trial (Nabkasorn 2005) provided data in graphical form only which we were able to include after manually converting the graph into mean and SD values. Hence, data from 25 trials were used in the meta-analyses.

Three trials (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; Mather 2001) provided data on whether patients fulfilled diagnostic criteria for depression at the end of the study, as well as depression scales. We used the scale results described in the paper (rather than using

formulae to convert the dichotomous outcomes to continuous outcomes) to allow inclusion of these trials in the meta-analysis.

### *Types of study design*

Thirteen trials had two arms (Bonnet 2005, Chou 2004, Fetsch 1979, Knuppen 2007, Martinsen 1985; Mather 2001; Nabkasorn 2005, Pinchasov 2000, Reuter 1984, Singh 1997, Tsang 2006, Veale 1992; Vickers 2005), 11 had three arms (Blumenthal 1999, Doyne 1987, Epstein 1986, Fremont 1987, Greist 1979, Hess-Homeier 1981, Klein 1985, McCann 1984, McNeil 1991; Mutrie 1988; Singh 2005), two had four arms (Orth 1979; Blumenthal 2007), one had five arms (four intensities of exercise and control) (DOSE 2002) and one had six arms (CBT plus aerobic exercise, aerobic exercise only, CBT only, CBT plus non-aerobic exercise, non-aerobic exercise only or no intervention) (Setaro 1985).

Of the 13 trials with two arms, exercise was compared with wait-list or usual care in three trials (Chou 2004; Nabkasorn 2005, Veale 1992), exercise was compared with a placebo intervention (e.g. social activity) in six trials (Knuppen 2007; Martinsen 1985; Mather 2001; Singh 1997; Tsang 2006; Vickers 2005), exercise was compared with CBT in two trials (Fetsch 1979; Reuter 1984), two trials compared CBT plus exercise versus CBT alone (Bonnet 2005, Reuter 1984) and one trial compared exercise with bright light therapy (Pinchasov 2000).

Of the 11 trials with three arms, one trial compared exercise versus exercise plus sertraline versus sertraline (Blumenthal 1999), three compared exercise versus wait list versus a placebo intervention (e.g. social activity) (McCann 1984; McNeil 1991; Mutrie 1988), two compared exercise versus usual care versus CBT (Epstein 1986; Hess-Homeier 1981), one compared exercise versus CBT versus both exercise and CBT (Fremont 1987), one compared exercise versus low intensity CBT versus high intensity CBT (Greist 1979), one compared exercise versus a placebo versus CBT, (Klein 1985), one compared high intensity resistance training versus low intensity resistance training versus usual care (Singh 2005) and one compared running versus weight-lifting versus wait-list (Doyne 1987). Of the trials with four arms, one compared exercise to three types of control (Orth 1979) and the other compared home-based exercise versus supervised exercise versus sertraline versus placebo (Blumenthal 2007).

### *Types of participants*

21 trials recruited participants from non-clinical populations (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; McNeil 1991; Doyne 1987; Fremont 1987; Epstein 1986; Klein 1985; McCann 1984; Hess-Homeier 1981; DOSE 2002; Nabkasorn 2005; Pinchasov 2000; Setaro 1985; Singh 1997; Singh 2005; Tsang 2006; Vickers 2005; Greist 1979; Orth 1979; Fetsch 1979; Bonnet 2005) with most involving recruitment of participants through the media. Six trials recruited participants from clinical populations (i.e. hospital in-patients or out-patients) (Knuppen 2007; Chou 2004; Martinsen 1985; Mutrie 1988; Reuter 1984; Veale 1992). One recruited participants from both clinical and non-clinical populations (Mather 2001).

Of the 21 trials recruiting people from non-clinical populations, diagnosis of depression was by a clinical interview in nine studies (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; Bonnet 2005; DOSE 2002; Doyne 1987; Klein 1985; Pinchasov 2000; Singh 1997; Singh 2005). The other 12 studies used a cut-off point on one of several depression scales (Beck Depression Inventory: Epstein 1986; Fremont 1987; Fetsch 1979 Hess-Homeier 1981; McCann 1984; McNeil 1991), CES-D (Nabkasorn 2005; Vickers 2005), Geriatric Depression Scale (Tsang 2006), Depression Adjective Checklist (Orth 1979), Symptom Checklist Score (Greist 1979) or Minnesota Multiple Personality Inventory (Setaro 1985). There were more women than men (see Characteristics of included studies table), and mean age ranged from 22 years (Orth 1979) to 82.7 years (Tsang 2006).

### *Types of Interventions*

Twenty-one trials provided aerobic exercise, of which 13 trials provided running (Blumenthal 1999; Doyne 1987; Epstein 1986; Fetsch 1979; Fremont 1987; Greist 1979; Hess-Homeier 1981; Klein 1985; McCann 1984; Nabkasorn 2005; Orth 1979; Reuter 1984; Veale 1992), three provided treadmill walking (Bonnet 2005; Blumenthal 2007; DOSE 2002), two provided walking (Knuppen 2007; McNeil 1991), one provided aerobic training with an instructor (Martinsen 1985), one provided aerobic dance (Setaro 1985) and one which provided cycling on a stationary bike (Pinchasov 2000). Two provided mixed exercise i.e. endurance, muscle strengthening and stretching (Mather 2001; Mutrie 1988), one provided Tai-Chi (Chou 2004), two provided resistance training (Singh 1997; Singh 2005), one provided Qigong exercises (Tsang 2006) and one provided 'individually tailored' exercises (Vickers 2005). For the purposes of our meta-analyses, we classified Qigong and Tai-Chi as mixed exercises. Two provided resistance training alone (Singh 1997; Singh 2005).

Thirteen trials (Bonnet 2005; Blumenthal 2007; Chou 2004; DOSE 2002; Doyne 1987; Fremont 1987; Knuppen 2007; McCann 1984; Mather 2001; Mutrie 1988; Setaro 1985; Singh 1997; Singh 2005) provided indoor exercise, one trial provided outdoor exercise (McNeil 1991) and the remaining trials did not report whether the exercise was indoors or outdoors.

Only one trial stated that unsupervised exercise was provided (Orth 1979). One trial included both supervised and home-based exercise arms (Blumenthal 2007). The other trials provided supervised exercise or did not report this information. Seven (DOSE 2002; Blumenthal 2007; Doyne 1987; Greist 1979; Klein 1985; McNeil 1991; Mutrie 1988; Orth 1979) provided individual exercises, 11 provided group exercises (Blumenthal 1999; Chou 2004; Fetsch 1979; Fremont 1987; McCann 1984; Mather 2001; Nabkasorn 2005; Setaro 1985; Singh 1997; Singh 2005; Veale 1992) and the remaining trials did not report this information.

The duration of the intervention ranged from 10 days (Knuppen 2007) to 16 weeks (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; Tsang 2006).

### *Types of outcomes*

Other clinical endpoints and adverse effects

Four trials recorded clinical endpoints as well as mood (Knuppen 2007; length of hospital stay), Mather 2001 (patient and clinical global impression), Singh 1997 (sickness impact profile) and Singh 2005: quality of life). Five trials systematically recorded and reported adverse events (DOSE 2002; Blumenthal 2007; Knuppen 2007; Singh 1997; Singh 2005). No trial provided data on costs.

#### Excluded studies

Of the 116 papers excluded, 67 papers described clinical trials. The reasons for excluding these 67 clinical trials are described in more detail below.

Twenty five studies were non-randomised trials (Auchus 1994; Blue 1979; Conroy 1982; D'Amato 1990; Dimeo 2001; Doyne 1983; Fetsch 1983; Giardinelli 1996; Hartz 1982; Hayward 2000; Johnson 1986; Kaplan 1983; Kurz 1998; Moreau 1981; Palleschi 1998; Pappas 1990; Stein 1989; Roth 1986; Margolis 1982; Stewart 1994; Sanstead 1983; Williams 1979; Williams 1986; Martinsen 1989b; Rief 1996).

In 22 trials, participants did not have to have depression (as defined by the authors of the trial) to be eligible for the trial (Carney 1987; Dalton 1980; Eby 1985; Hannaford 1988; Hembree 2000; Herrera 1994; Hughes 1986; Kim 2004; Kupecz 2001; Lai 2006; Leppamaki 2002; Morey 2003; Motl 2004; Neidig 1999; Nguyen 2001; Palenzuela 1998; Rhodes 1980; Salminen 2005; Stein 1992; Stern 1983; Tsang 2003; Tenorio 1986).

Seven trials provided a combination of treatments (which included exercise) (Buffone 1980; Brown 2001 d; D'Amato 1990; Herrera 1994; Nickel 2005; Ouyang 2001).

One trial was a retrospective subgroup analysis of depressed patients from a randomised trial of exercise for osteoarthritis (Penninx 2002).

Seven trials compared two types of exercise with no non-exercising control (Bosscher 1993; Passmore 2006; Sexton 1989; TREAD 2004; Veale 1992 b; Wieman 1980; Williams 1992).

Two trials included only a single bout of exercise (Bodin 2004; Bartholomew 2005) and one trial provided exercise for only 4 days (Berlin 2003).

Two trials that recruited patients with post-natal depression were excluded (Armstrong 2003, Armstrong 2004).

#### Ongoing studies

Five ongoing trials fulfilled our inclusion criteria (DEMO 2007; McClure 2008; OPERA 2008; Peacock 2006; UPBEAT 2006). These will be included in future updates of the review.

## Risk of bias in included studies

### Allocation concealment

Allocation concealment was adequate in 8 trials (DOSE 2002; Blumenthal 2007; Mather 2001; Martinsen 1985; Singh 1997; Singh 2005; Veale 1992; Knuppen 2007).

### Incomplete outcome data

Seven trials performed 'intention to treat' (ITT) analyses (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; DOSE 2002; Mather 2001; Mutrie 1988; McNeil 1991; Singh 1997). Two trials reported data for individual patients (Orth 1979; Bonnet 2005), so by using last observation carried forward we replaced data from the patients who did not complete the trial and included these data in the meta-analysis of ITT trials. One trial reported that the analysis was ITT, because it used the 'worse case assumption' to replace data from patients who did not complete the trial, but only included 38 of the 39 randomised patients in the analyses, so we classified it as 'not ITT' (Knuppen 2007).

Long-term follow-up data beyond the end of the interventions are described for five trials (Klein 1985 (follow-up for 9 months), Blumenthal 1999 at 10 months); Singh 1997 at 26 months, Mather 2001 (follow-up at 34 weeks), and Fremont 1987 (follow-up at 4 months). The remaining trials assessed participants only at the end of the interventions.

### Blinding

Seven trials included blinding of outcome assessor (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007; DOSE 2002; Klein 1985; Mather 2001; Singh 2005, Knuppen 2007).

### Other sources of bias

One trial (Tsang 2006) stopped recruiting when the main outcome measure became statistically significant, rather than stipulating in advance how many people to recruit. This approach means that the results were probably biased in favour of exercise.

## Effects of interventions

We included 25 trials in our meta-analyses. The remaining three trials could not be included for the reasons stated above (Greist 1979; McCann 1984; Vickers 2005).

### COMPARISON 1: EXERCISE VERSUS CONTROL

23 trials (907 participants) included a comparison of exercise with either wait-list or placebo.

#### Primary outcome measure

##### *Reduction in symptom severity at post-treatment (Graph 1.1)*

The pooled standardised mean difference (SMD) calculated using the random effects model was -0.82 (95% CI -1.12 to -0.51), indicating a large clinical effect. There was significant heterogeneity ( $I^2=77\%$ ).

##### *Reduction in symptom severity at follow-up (Graph 1.2)*

The pooled SMD from the five trials (Klein 1985; Blumenthal 1999; Singh 1997; Mather 2001; Fremont 1987) (218 participants) that provided long-term follow-up data found only a moderate effect (SMD -0.44, 95% CI -0.71 to -0.18). No statistical heterogeneity was indicated.

#### Secondary outcome measures

Insufficient numbers of trials (see description of studies) reported other clinical endpoints or adverse events to perform meta-analyses of these outcomes. Four trials reported a lack of difference in

adverse events between groups (DOSE 2002; Singh 1997; Singh 2005; Knuppen 2007).

## COMPARISON 2: EXERCISE VERSUS COGNITIVE THERAPY

### Primary outcome (Graph 2.1)

Six trials (152 participants) provided data comparing exercise with cognitive therapy, the SMD was -0.17 (95% CI -0.51, 0.18), indicating no significant difference between the two interventions. No statistical heterogeneity was indicated.

### Secondary outcomes

Insufficient numbers of trials reported other clinical endpoints or adverse events to perform meta-analyses of these outcomes.

## COMPARISON 3: EXERCISE VERSUS BRIGHT LIGHT THERAPY

### Primary outcome (Graph 3.1)

One trial found that exercise was superior to bright light therapy in reducing depression symptoms (Pinchasov 2000) (WMD -6.40, 95% CI -10.20, -2.60).

### Secondary outcomes

Insufficient numbers of trials reported other clinical endpoints or adverse events to perform meta-analyses of these outcomes

## COMPARISON 4: EXERCISE VERSUS ANTIDEPRESSANTS

### Primary outcome (Graph 4.1)

For the two trials (201 participants) that compared exercise with antidepressants (Blumenthal 1999; Blumenthal 2007) the SMD was -0.04 (95% CI -0.31, 0.24), indicating no significant difference between the two interventions.

### Secondary outcomes

One trial found significantly higher rates of diarrhoea and loose stool in the sertraline than the exercise group (Blumenthal 2007).

### Subgroup analyses

#### Type of exercise

We explored the influence of the type of exercise on outcomes. The SMD for aerobic exercise indicated a moderate clinical effect (SMD -0.63, 95% CI -0.95, -0.30), whilst the SMDs for both mixed exercise (SMD -1.47, 95% CI -2.56, -0.37) and resistance exercise (SMD -1.34, 95% CI -2.07, -0.61) indicated large effect sizes, but confidence intervals were wide.

#### Intensity of exercise

We attempted to extract data on intensity of exercise but this was reported for only a few trials, and there was too much variation in other aspects of the trial methodologies to attribute differences in outcomes to differences exercise intensities. One of the included trials compared four different 'doses' of aerobic exercise (DOSE 2002) and found the public health dose was significantly more effective than the low dose and control in reducing weekly HRSD scores. One of the included trial provided two intensities of progressive resistance training (Singh 2005) and found that the high intensity training was more effective than the low intensity training.

Eight trials measured indices of fitness and correlated these with study bias (Beggs test  $p = 0.13$ , Egger test  $p = 0.09$ ).

mood (Blumenthal 1999; Doyne 1987; Fremont 1987; Knuppen 2007; Martinsen 1985; Pinchasov 2000; Singh 2005; Veale 1992).

Of these, four trials found that mood correlated with fitness (Blumenthal 1999; Pinchasov 2000; Martinsen 1985; Singh 2005) whilst the other four trials found no relationship.

We considered whether to perform additional subgroup analyses according to the following criteria: supervised vs unsupervised, indoor vs outdoor and individual vs group, but this information was not reported for a substantial number of studies (see description of studies above) and so any analysis might have been biased. One trial found no difference between supervised and home-based exercise (Blumenthal 2007).

### Sensitivity analyses

Sensitivity analyses were conducted for the first comparison of exercise versus waiting list or placebo.

#### Peer reviewed journal publications (Graph 6.1)

For the 21 trials (867 participants) that were reported in peer reviewed journal publications, the SMD was -0.66 (95% CI -0.95, -0.37), showing a moderate clinical effect of borderline statistical significance in favour of exercise

#### Published as abstracts/conference proceedings only (Graph 6.2)

The pooled SMD for the two studies published as conference abstracts only was -2.17 (95% CI -3.06, -1.27), showing a large, statistically significant effect size in favour of exercise.

#### Allocation concealment (Graph 6.3)

For the eight trials (430 participants) with adequate allocation concealment, the SMD was -0.77 (95% CI -1.12, -0.42), showing a large clinical effect in favour of exercise.

#### Use of intention to treat analysis (Graph 6.4)

For the nine trials (403 participants) with intention to treat analyses, the SMD was -0.63 (95% CI -1.16, -0.10), showing a moderate clinical effect of borderline statistical significance in favour of exercise.

#### Blinded outcome assessment (Graph 6.5)

For the seven trials (411 participants) with blinded outcome assessments, the SMD was -0.39 (95% CI -0.75, -0.03), showing a moderate clinical effect of borderline statistical significance in favour of exercise.

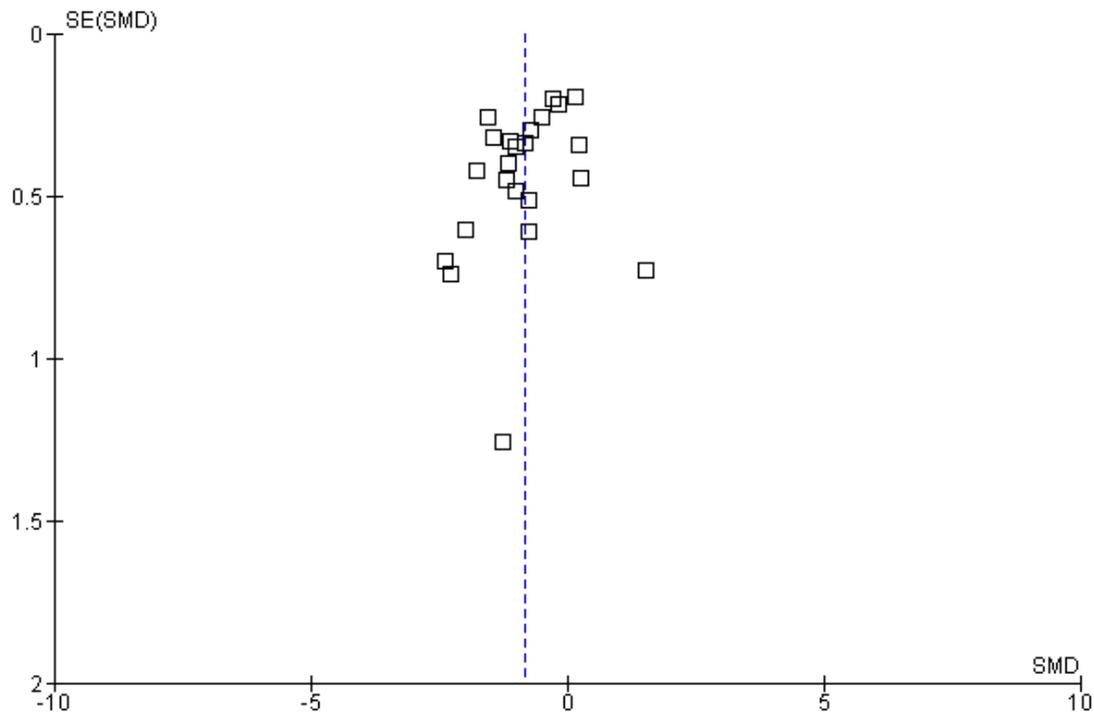
#### Allocation concealment, intention to treat analysis and blinded outcome assessment (Graph 6.6)

For the three trials (Blumenthal 2007, DOSE 2002, Mather 2001) (216 participants) with adequate allocation concealment and intention to treat analyses and blinded outcome assessment, the SMD was -0.42 (95% CI -0.88, 0.03) i.e. a moderate clinical effect, which was not statistically significant.

### Publication bias

We explored publication bias for Comparison 1.1, exercise versus control, using a Funnel plot (Figure 1). Visual inspection suggested asymmetry, indicating a relationship between intervention effect and study size, suggesting either publication bias or a systematic difference between small and larger studies (small study effects). However, there was no conclusive statistical evidence for small

**Figure 1. Funnel plot of comparison: I Exercise versus control, outcome: I.I Reduction in depression symptoms post treatment.**



### Recruitment and retention of participants

Additional Table 1 presents data about the feasibility of recruiting and retaining patients both in the trial as a whole and in the exercise intervention in particular. We extracted data, when available, about the number of patients who were considered for inclusion in each trial, although this information was not available for all trials. The trials that did provide these data used different recruitment techniques (ranging from screening of people responding to advertisements to inclusion of those patients who were considered eligible by a referring doctor). Hence, we decided not to pool these data.

We extracted data on the number randomised and completing each trial (see Additional Table 1). This ranged from 100% completion (Mather 2001; McNeil 1991; Mutrie 1988; Singh 1997; Tsang 2006) to 42% completion (Doyne 1987). For the exercise intervention, this ranged from 100% completion (Mather 2001; McNeil 1991; Mutrie 1988; Singh 1997), to 55% completion (Klein 1985).

Nine trials reported attendance rates for exercise; these were 59% (Mather 2001), 70% (Doyne 1987), 72% (DOSE 2002), 78% (Nabkasorn 2005), 92% (Blumenthal 1999, Blumenthal 2007), 93% (Singh 1997), 95% (Chou 2004), 95% to 100% (Singh 2005). One trial rescheduled missed visits (McNeil 1991) so par-

ticipants attended the full course of exercise. As with intensity of exercise, it is difficult to attribute any differences in outcome to differences in attendance rates, because there were other sources of variation in the type of interventions (e.g. duration of intervention, type of exercise) and differences in the methodological quality between trials which might account for differences in outcome.

## DISCUSSION

### Summary of main results

This review found that exercise has a large effect (SMD -0.82, 95% CI -1.12, -0.51) on depressive symptoms in people with a diagnosis of depression when compared with no treatment (waiting list/placebo). However, it is likely that this result is biased in favour of exercise for methodological reasons. When only those trials with blinded outcome assessments were included in the analysis, the effect size was only moderate, though of borderline statistical significance. When only those trials with intention to treat analyses were included, the effect size was similarly moderate but only of borderline statistical significance. When only those tri-

als fulfilling all three methodological criteria, including allocation concealment, were included, the effect size was moderate and not statistically significant. Effect sizes were higher for mixed exercise and resistance exercise than aerobic exercise alone, but confidence intervals were wide and other methodological aspects of the trials may have confounded these analyses. We excluded trials which compared two types of exercise intervention without a non-exercising control group, as these were not relevant to our particular research question. When compared with other established treatments (CBT and antidepressants), there was no difference between exercise and the established intervention. The effect of exercise on depressive symptoms in those trials which included long-term follow-up was only moderate, suggesting that the benefits of exercise may gradually be lost after the intervention is completed, implying that exercise may need to be continued long-term in order to maintain the initial benefits. The need for long-term treatments is sometimes also true for other interventions such as antidepressants for depression. One challenge is how best to ensure that people continue to exercise in the longer term.

Outstanding uncertainties remain about how effective exercise is for depression, mainly because of methodological considerations. Furthermore, if exercise is of benefit for depression, we cannot determine the optimum type, frequency and duration of exercise, whether it should be performed supervised or unsupervised, indoors or outdoors, or in a group or alone. Only five trials reported adverse events (DOSE 2002, Knuppen 2007, Singh 1997, Singh 2005; Blumenthal 2007); adverse events were generally uncommon. One trial found that loose stools were more common in the sertraline than exercise group (Blumenthal 2007). Ideally both the risks and benefits of exercise for depression should be evaluated in future trials. There were no data on costs, so we cannot comment on the cost-effectiveness of exercise for depression.

The mechanisms by which exercise may improve depression remain uncertain. There was no clear relationship between the duration of the exercise intervention and outcomes. If exercise improves mood via improvements in fitness, we would have expected the trials which were longer in duration to demonstrate the bigger effect sizes. Only half of the trials which related mood to indices of physical fitness found significant correlations. If exercise mediated changes in mood by improving fitness, we might have expected significant correlations in all trials. One trial found that more intense exercise led to larger improvements in mood (Singh 2005). Another trial, DOSE 2002, found that the public health dose of exercise was significantly more effective than the low dose and control in reducing weekly HRSD scores. All the trials except one provided supervised exercise, so we cannot determine whether the improvements in mood may have been mediated by social contact with the person supervising the exercise. One trial found no difference between supervised and home-based exercise (Blumenthal 2007).

The data we extracted on aspects of feasibility (see additional Table

1) suggest that a large number of people need to be screened to identify suitable participants, unless recruiting from a clinical population e.g. in-patients with depression. A substantial number of people dropped out from both the exercise and control interventions, and even those who remained in the trial until the outcome assessments were not able to attend all exercise sessions. These data demonstrate some of the challenges of performing exercise trials for depression, and should be considered when designing future trials.

### Overall completeness and applicability of evidence

The literature was systematically searched in 2001 (Lawlor 2001). The extensive search strategy in 2001 included electronic searches, hand-searching, and contact with authors to identify unpublished studies. The search performed in 2007 was also extensive: the electronic searches were provided by the Cochrane CCDN Review Group (note that the review group regularly searches the literature for relevant trials). The reviewers also checked reference lists and review articles, performed citation searches to identify further studies, and made contact with the authors of the studies published since the initial review in 2001 (Lawlor 2001) in order to identify any other trials (published, unpublished or ongoing). As a final check for ongoing studies, we searched [www.controlled-trials.com](http://www.controlled-trials.com). Altogether, 144 full references were obtained and carefully scrutinised, of which 28 trials fulfilled our criteria. However, it is possible that we have missed unpublished trials.

The results of this review are applicable to patients with a diagnosis of depression who participated in a programme of regular physical exercise within the context of a clinical trial, and the trials we identified are relevant to the review question. There were more women than men, and there was a wide range in mean ages (22 years to 87.5 years). Whether the same effect sizes (on mood) would be found in other types of exercise programmes outside the context of a clinical trial, is uncertain. This review cannot make any recommendations of the effectiveness of exercise referral schemes for depression (DOH 2001) as none of the trials specifically evaluated these programmes. Nor can we draw any conclusions about the effect of exercise on other relevant outcomes such as quality of life, activities of daily living, or its cost-effectiveness because the majority of trials did not systematically report this information. We cannot comment about the effect of exercise in people with dysthymia (or sub-clinical depression) and those without mood disorders, as we explicitly excluded these trials from the review. Future systematic reviews and meta-analyses might include these people, though new reviews would need to ensure that the search strategy was sufficiently comprehensive to identify all relevant trials. We made a post-hoc decision to exclude two trials of exercise for post-natal depression, as another Cochrane review will address this question.

### Quality of the evidence

We included 28 trials in our review, which ranged in size from

11 participants to 202 participants. The number of comparison groups ranged from two to six, and there was wide variation in the type and duration of the exercise intervention. The majority of the trials had methodological weaknesses. We explicitly aimed to determine the influence of study quality, in particular allocation concealment, blinding and intention to treat analyses on effect sizes. When only those trials with adequate allocation concealment, intention to treat analysis and blinded outcome assessors were included, the effect size was moderate and not statistically significant.

### Potential biases in the review process

We attempted to avoid bias by ensuring that we had identified all relevant studies through comprehensive systematic searching of the literature and contact with authors of the trials to identify other trials, both published and unpublished. However, we accept that some publication bias is inevitable. This is likely to lead to an overestimate of effect sizes, because positive trials are more likely to be published than negative trials. We attempted to obtain further information from authors, particularly to clarify methodological aspects of the trials but for some trials this information could not be obtained. We used the same protocol as had been used in 2001 (Lawlor 2001) but had to make a number of post-hoc decisions in relation to inclusion or exclusion of trials. For example, several trials were described as a 'combination' intervention; we decided to exclude these as we would not have been able to determine the effect of exercise on its own. We also made post-hoc decisions, on the advice of the editorial team, to exclude a trial which provided an exercise intervention which lasted only FOUR days (Berlin 2003) and also to exclude trials in post-natal depression (Armstrong 2003; Armstrong 2004). Exclusion of these trials did not influence the overall result of the review.

### Agreements and disagreements with other studies or reviews

Previous systematic reviews which found that exercise improved depression included uncontrolled trials (North 1990; Craft 1998; Carlson 1991, so the results of these reviews are probably biased in favour of exercise. A more recent systematic review (Stathopoulou 2006) which identified trials in peer-reviewed journals only included only nine of the trials which we identified for our review (Klein 1985; Doyne 1987; McNeil 1991; Veale 1992; Singh 1997; Singh 2005; Pinchasov 2000; DOSE 2002), and also included two trials which we had excluded (Bosscher 1993; Sexton 1989). This review (Stathopoulou 2006) found a larger effect size than we did. A further review included only older people (Sjosten 2006), whereas we included all ages of participants.

## AUTHORS' CONCLUSIONS

### Implications for practice

It is reasonable to recommend exercise to people with depressive symptoms and to those who fulfil diagnostic criteria for depression.

However, we cannot give people accurate information about how effective exercise might be, nor can recommendations be made about the relative benefits of aerobic exercise, resistance exercise or mixed exercise, whether group or individual exercises are better, nor about the optimum duration of exercise. Given that the drop-out rates from exercise can be substantial, a pragmatic approach would be to recommend that patients choose a form of exercise which they will enjoy; this may improve adherence and increase the likelihood that people will continue exercise long-term.

### Implications for research

Future systematic reviews and meta-analyses could be performed to investigate the effect of exercise on people with dysthymia. Trials comparing two types of exercise could also be systematically reviewed, to provide more insights into the possible mechanisms by which exercise may improve depression. A future update of the current review, including results from ongoing trials, will increase the accuracy of estimates of effect sizes.

This review found that methodological factors, in particular intention to treat analyses and blinding of outcome assessors, influenced effect sizes and the significance of these effects. Hence, further trials that are methodologically robust are required to determine more accurately the effect of exercise on depression. The ongoing trials we identified will provide further data in the next few years. Additional trials that formally evaluate whether Exercise on Referral Schemes are effective for depression would also be useful (NICE 2006). Future trials need to report adverse events and costs. Researchers must consider how to optimise recruitment and how to motivate participants to attend prescribed exercise sessions. If participants do not actually attend exercise sessions, trial results are more likely to be negative.

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The updated version of the review was led by Dr Mead; co-reviewers are Dr Morley, Professor Lawlor and Professor McMurdo. Subsequently Dr Carolyn Greig, Senior Research Fellow, joined the review team to provide expertise in physical activity, and Mr Paul Campbell, also joined the team to provide expertise in depression. Ms Maureen Harding, Geriatric Medicine, University of

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The views expressed in this review are those of the authors.

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\* Indicates the major publication for the study

## CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDIES

### Characteristics of included studies [ordered by study ID]

#### Blumenthal 1999

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media. Eligible if had DSM IV major depressive disorder Mean age 70 (range 61-88) 63% female N = 156	
Interventions	1. Group walking or jogging 3 times per week 2. Sertraline (SSRI) at standard dose 3. Combined walking or jogging and sertraline Duration of interventions: 16 weeks. Exercise intensity was 70% to 85% of target heart rate	
Outcomes	1. Clinical diagnosis of depression using DSM-IV 2. Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression 3. Beck Depression Inventory	
Notes	Analysis intention to treat, using last observation carried forward for missing data. Reviewers used group 2 and group 3 in the meta-analysis Outcome assessor blind	
<b><i>Risk of bias</i></b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

#### Blumenthal 2007

Methods	RCT	
Participants	People with major depression recruited through television, radio and newspaper. mean age 52 SD 8, 76% women. N=202	
Interventions	1. Home based aerobic exercise 2. Supervised aerobic exercise 3. Sertraline 4. Placebo Intervention 16 weeks	
Outcomes	Primary endpoint was remission (no MDD) and a HAM score of <8, and also a continuous severity score on the HAM-D	

**Blumenthal 2007** (Continued)

Notes	Analysis intention to treat using last observation carried forward Blinded outcome assessment	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Bonnet 2005**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	University counselling service Mean age 23.3 years 82% women N=11	
Interventions	1. CBT plus exercise 2. CBT alone Exercise was walking on a treadmill for 20 minutes, twice a week for 6 weeks Cognitive therapy: met counsellors once a week for 9 weeks	
Outcomes	1. DSM IV MDD, dysthymia or depressive disorder 2. Above cut-off depression on BDI and CES-D	
Notes	Self report Randomisation method not stated 7/11 randomised patients completed the interventions. Data provided for each patient. Mean and SD calculated by us carrying forward baseline data for patients who dropped out	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Chou 2004**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Patients attending a psychogeriatric outpatient department with unipolar major depression or dysthymia Mean age 72.6 50% female	

**Chou 2004** (Continued)

	N=14	
Interventions	1. Tai Chi exercise 2. Wait list control Tai-chi led by a Tai chi practitioner, 45 minutes, 3 times a week for 3 months. Not stated if in a group or alone	
Outcomes	CES-D (total score and subscales)	
Notes	Randomisation method not stated, unclear if intention to treat, unclear if outcome assessor blind to treatment allocation	
<b><i>Risk of bias</i></b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**DOSE 2002**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media. Men or women aged 20-45 with mild to moderate depression Mean age 35.9 75% women N=80	
Interventions	4 different doses of exercise 1. Public health dose 3/week 2. Public health dose 5/week 3. Low dose 3/week. 4. High dose 3/week 5. Control Exercise was on a treadmill or stationary bike, individually and monitored by laboratory staff Duration 12 weeks	
Outcomes	Change in HRSD from baseline to 12 weeks . Note that public health dose 3/ week had greatest effect and was included in the meta-analysis	
Notes	Intention to treat (though data from the last available exercise session rather than data collected at 12 weeks were used in the analysis) Outcome assessors blind	
<b><i>Risk of bias</i></b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Doyne 1987**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media Mean age 28.5 (SD 4.36) 100% female N = 40	
Interventions	1. Supervised running or walking 4 times a week for 8 weeks 2. Supervised strength training 4 times a week 3. Waiting list control	
Outcomes	1. Beck Depression Inventory 2. Lubin's Depression Adjective List 3. Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<b><i>Risk of bias</i></b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

**Epstein 1986**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media Mean age 39.4 (range 24-60) 92% female	
Interventions	1. Group walking or jogging for 30 minutes 3-5 times a week for 8 weeks 2. Cognitive therapy 1 session of 1.5 hours per week 3. Waiting list control	
Outcomes	1. Beck Depression Inventory 2. Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<b><i>Risk of bias</i></b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>

**Epstein 1986** (Continued)

Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate
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**Fetsch 1979**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Depressed people referred from a University counselling service and recruited via advertisements
Interventions	1. Running 4 session over 4 weeks 2. Stroking therapy (a type of 'talking' therapy). 4 sessions over 4 weeks)
Outcomes	1. Beck depression inventory
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind (self report) analysis not intention to treat (only 16/21 randomised patients completed trial and were included in the analysis)

*Risk of bias*

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Fremont 1987**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media Data on age and gender not available N = 61
Interventions	1. Group running 2. Cognitive therapy 3. Combined running and cognitive therapy 10 weeks
Outcomes	Beck depression Inventory
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat

*Risk of bias*

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

**Greist 1979**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers Age range 18-30 53.4% female N = 28	
Interventions	1. Supervised running 2. Time limited psychotherapy 3. Time unlimited psychotherapy	
Outcomes	Symptom checklist score	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<i>Risk of bias</i>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

**Hess-Homeier 1981**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media Data on age and gender distribution not available N = 20	
Interventions	1. Running or walking with the instructor for 30 minutes 4 times a week for 8 weeks 2. Cognitive therapy: 1 session of 1 hour and 2 of half an hour per week 3. Waiting list control	
Outcomes	Beck depression inventory	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<i>Risk of bias</i>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

**Klein 1985**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via media Mean age 30.1 (SD 6.72) 72% female N = 74
Interventions	1. Supervised running twice a week for 12 weeks 2. Group cognitive therapy for 2 hours once a week 3. Control group: meditation for 1 hour twice weekly
Outcomes	1. Symptom Checklist 2. Target symptoms 3. Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour 4. Social Adjustment Self-reported Questionnaire 5. Cornell Medical Index 6. Role Rating Questionnaire 7. Hamilton Rating Scale 8. Global Assessment Scale
Notes	Main outcome assessment not blind. Hamilton Rating Scale administered by interviewer blind to allocation. Analysis not intention to treat

***Risk of bias***

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

**Knuppen 2007**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Inpatients with major depression Mean age 49 55% women N=38
Interventions	1. Walking training for 10 days 2. placebo (low intensity stretching and relaxation)
Outcomes	1. Bech-Rafaelsen Scale (BRMS) 2. Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)
Notes	Authors state intention to treat. but of the 39 recruited, only 38 were used in the analysis. Outcome assessor for BRMS blinded to treatment allocation

***Risk of bias***

**Knuppen 2007** (Continued)

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Martinsen 1985**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Psychiatric hospital inpatients Mean age 40 (range 17-60) Data on sex distribution not available N = 49
Interventions	1. Aerobic exercise with instructor for 1 hour three times a week for 9 weeks 2. Control group attended occupational therapy whilst intervention group exercised
Outcomes	Beck Depression Inventory
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat

**Risk of bias**

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Mather 2001**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Primary care, psychiatric services, advertisement in paper and radio. N=86 (59 female and 27 male) Mean age 63.7 (range 53-78) in exercise and 66.2 (56-91) in control group
Interventions	1. endurance, muscle strengthening and stretching 2. health education classes 10 weeks
Outcomes	1. Hamilton rating scale for depression 2. Geriatric Depression Scale 3. Clinical global impression 4. Patient global impression
Notes	Outcome assessor blind Intention to treat

**Mather 2001** (Continued)

<i>Risk of bias</i>		
Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**McCann 1984**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Undergraduate psychology students with a requirement to participate in a research project No details of age 100% female N = 47
Interventions	1. Aerobic exercise: group running, jogging or dancing for 1 hour twice weekly for 10 weeks 2. Placebo control group - muscle relaxation for 15-20 minutes 4 times a week 3. Waiting list control
Outcomes	Beck Depression Inventory
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat

*Risk of bias*

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

**McNeil 1991**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Community volunteers from religious and community organisations Mean age 72.5 Details of gender distribution not provided N = 30
Interventions	1. Walking accompanied by investigator for 20 minutes 3 times a week for 6 weeks 2. Social contact control group (visit by investigator for a "chat" avoiding any discussion of depression or health, twice a week) 3. Waiting list control group
Outcomes	Beck Depression Inventory

McNeil 1991 (Continued)

Notes	Outcome assessment not blind All completed intervention so classified as intention to treat	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

Mutrie 1988

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Depressed patients referred to study by general practitioner (primary care physician) Mean age 42.1 83% female N = 36	
Interventions	1. Aerobic exercise - conducted on an individual basis and without group contact, 29 minutes 3 times a week for 4 weeks 2. Strength and stretching exercise completed on an individual basis and without group contact, 20 minutes 3 times a week 3. Waiting list control	
Outcomes	1. Beck Depression Inventory 2. Profile of Mood States	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind All completed intervention so analysis intention to treat	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	No	C - Inadequate

Nabkasorn 2005

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Student nurses with mild to moderate depressive symptoms aged 18-20 All female N=59	
Interventions	1. group jogging 50 minutes a day 5 days a week for 8 weeks 2. usual care	

**Nabkasorn 2005** (Continued)

Outcomes	1. CES-D scores (data from means and SD at end of treatment not available so obtained from published graph)	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Orth 1979**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	College students with dysphoria or depression mean age 22 27% female N=11	
Interventions	1. Jogging 5 times a week for 30 minutes over 4 weeks 2. Meditation 3. Self-chosen activity 4. Self monitoring (control)	
Outcomes	1. Depression adjective checklist 2. Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory	
Notes	Randomisation method not stated. Self-report outcomes. Not stated whether intention to treat though all patients allocated control and running provided data at baseline and post-intervention	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Pinchasov 2000**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Several groups including one with depression in the absence of seasonal affective disorder Also one group of depressed people fulfilling criteria for seasonal affective disorder mean age 35.2 100% female	

**Pinchasov 2000** (Continued)

	N=63	
Interventions	1. 54 minutes per day of cycling on stationary bicycle for 1 week 2. bright light therapy	
Outcomes	1. HDRS score 2. Body weight 3. Oxygen consumption	
Notes	Randomisation method unclear. Unclear if outcome assessment was blind	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Reuter 1984**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	University students presenting to mental health clinic with depression Details of age and gender distribution not provided N = 18	
Interventions	1. Supervised running for at least 20 minutes 3 times a week for 10 weeks plus counselling 2. Counselling only	
Outcomes	Beck Depression Inventory	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	D - Not used

**Setaro 1985**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers recruited via the media Age range 18 to 35 (mean age not stated) 26% female 185 men and women aged 18 to 35 participated	

**Setaro 1985** (Continued)

Interventions	1. Cognitive therapy and aerobic dance classes 2. Aerobic dance classes only 3. Cognitive therapy only 4. Cognitive therapy and non-aerobic exercise classes 5. Non-aerobic exercise only 6. No intervention Duration of interventions was 10 weeks	
Outcomes	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Singh 1997**

Methods	RCT	
Participants	Community volunteers from two registers of individuals interested in participation in research Mean age 70 (range 61-88) 63% female N=32	
Interventions	1. Supervised non-aerobic progressive resistance training 3 times a week for 10 weeks 2. Control group received health seminars twice a week in which depression and mental health were not discussed	
Outcomes	1. Beck Depression Inventory 2. Hamilton Rating Scale of Depression	
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Intention to treat analysis	
<b>Risk of bias</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Authors' judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Singh 2005**

Methods	RCT
Participants	People responding to a postal questionnaire who had DSM IV depression or dysthymia Mean age 69 55% women N=60
Interventions	1. progressive resistance training at 80% of one repetition max 2. Resistance training at 20% of one repetition max 3. Usual care Each intervention group held three times a week for 8 weeks
Outcomes	1. Hamilton Rating Scale for depression 2. Geriatric Depression score
Notes	Not intention to treat (50/60 completed the study and were available for assessment) outcome. Outcome assessment blind

***Risk of bias***

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Tsang 2006**

Methods	RCT
Participants	People over 65 with either diagnosis of depression or features of depression in care homes. Of those finishing the study, mean age 82.8 in control group and 82.1 in the intervention group 68% female N=82
Interventions	1. Qigong (meditation, breathing exercise and body movement) 2. Newspaper reading group 16 weeks
Outcomes	1. Geriatric depression score (chinese version) 2. Chinese general self-efficacy scale 3. Personal well-being index 4. General health questionnaire 5. Self concept scale
Notes	Not intention to treat Not blinded outcome assessor stopped recruitment when results of the main outcome measure was significant

**Tsang 2006** (Continued)

<i>Risk of bias</i>		
Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Veale 1992**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Psychiatric hospital outpatients and day hospital patients Mean age 35.5 (range 19-58) 64% female N=41
Interventions	1. Group running 3 times a week for 12 weeks, plus routine care 2. Control group - routine care only
Outcomes	1. Beck Depression Inventory 2. State-trait anxiety inventory
Notes	Outcome assessment not blind Analysis not intention to treat

*Risk of bias*

Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Yes	A - Adequate

**Vickers 2005**

Methods	RCT
Participants	Depressed smoking women mean age 41 100% female N=60
Interventions	1. individually tailored exercises 2. health education
Outcomes	1. depressive symptom severity
Notes	Results published in abstract form and further details are not yet available

Vickers 2005 (Continued)

<i>Risk of bias</i>		
Item	Authors' judgement	Description
Allocation concealment?	Unclear	B - Unclear

**Characteristics of excluded studies [ordered by study ID]**

Study	Reason for exclusion
Antonelli 1982	non systematic review
Armstrong 2003	Post-natal depression
Armstrong 2004	Post-natal depression
Auchus 1994	non-randomised controlled trial
Bartholomew 2005	single bout of exercise
Berlin 2003	Duration of exercise was only 4 days
Biddle 1989	non systematic review
Blue 1979	non-randomised controlled trial
Bodin 2004	single bout of either martial arts or stationary bike
Bosscher 1993	comparing different types of exercise with no non-exercising control group
Boyll 1986	college students
Broocks 1997	non systematic review
Brown 2001 d	the intervention was multimodal, consisting of light exposure, exercise instructions and vitamins. control group took vitamins only
Buffone 1980	combination of exercise and cognitive behavioural therapy. No control group
Burbach 1997	non systematic review
Byrne 1993	non systematic review
Carney 1987	patients were those undergoing haemodialysis. Did not have to have depression to be included

(Continued)

Conroy 1982	non-randomised controlled trial
Coverley 1987	non systematic review
D'Amato 1990	non-randomised controlled trial. All subjects received both flexibility exercise and structured reminiscence
Dalton 1980	trial in a 'wheelchair bound population' with diverse aetiologies
DeVaney 1991	a trial of reducing exercise in those exercising more than 6 hours per week
DiLorenzo 1999	no outcome measure of depression
Dimeo 2001	non-randomised study of exercise for depression
Dishman 1995	non systematic review
Doynes 1983	non-randomised controlled trial
Eby 1985	Trial of exercise in students who did not have to have depression to enter trial
Emery 1990a	no outcome measure of depression
Emery 1990b	no outcome measure of depression
Fetsch 1983	non-randomised controlled trial
Fitzsimmons 2001	Not exercise (the participant was placed in wheelchair adapted for connection to the front of a bicycle, the carer pedalled and steered the bicycle)
Giardinelli 1996	non-randomised controlled trial
Glenister 1996	non systematic review
Hales 1987	non systematic review
Hannaford 1988	general mental health patients with no separation of those with depression
Hartz 1982	non-randomised controlled trial
Hayward 2000	non-randomised controlled trial
Hembree 2000	subjects were ageing female population residing in a retirement home environment
Herrera 1994	combination of psychological therapy and exercise in patients with chronic renal failure
Hughes 1986	effect of exercise on mood in people free from psychopathology

(Continued)

Kaplan 1983	non-randomised controlled trial
Khatri 2001	subgroup analysis of Blumenthal 1999
Kim 2004	effect of exercise on mental distress in healthy subjects
Knapen 2003	Non-psychotic psychiatric patients with no separation of those with depression
Kubesh 2003	outcome was executive function, no measurement of mood as an outcome
Kupez 2001	subjects were veterans
Kurz 1998	not described as randomised
Labbe 1988	comparison of exercise with exercise and instructions about how to improve compliance to exercise
Lacombe 1988	Three types of exercise, no non-exercising control
LaFontaine 1992	non systematic review
Lai 2006	trial in stroke patients. Did not have to have depression to be eligible
Leppamaki 2002	effects of exercise on symptoms of mental distress in subjects who are healthy
Margolis 1982	not described as randomised
Martinsen 1987	non systematic review
Martinsen 1988a	non systematic review
Martinsen 1988b	non systematic review
Martinsen 1989b	non-randomised controlled trial
Martinsen 1989c	non systematic review
Martinsen 1993	non systematic review
Martinsen 1994	non systematic review
Moore 1998	non systematic review
Moreau 1981	not described as randomised
Morey 2003	older sedentary adults
Motl 2004	older adults, did not have to be depressed to be included in the trial

(Continued)

Munro 1997	Cost effectiveness analysis of the likely public health benefits of purchasing exercise for over 65s
Neidig 1999	subjects had HIV infection
Netz 1994	general mental health patients with no separation of those with depression
Nguyen 2001	trial in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
Ouyang 2001	Combination of sports training and cognitive therapy. Control was waiting list
Palleschi 1998	non-randomised controlled trial
Palmer 2005	Subjects were recovering from substance abuse
Pappas 1990	non-randomised controlled trial
Passmore 2006	aerobic exercise versus aerobic and resistance exercise, no non-exercising control
Pelham 1993	general mental health patients with no separation of those with depression
Penninx 2002	retrospective subgroup analysis of patients who participated in a randomised trial of exercise for knee osteoarthritis who also had depression
Perri 1984	no outcome measure of depression
Pezzarossa 1991	non systematic review
Plante 1996	non systematic review
Raglin 1990	non systematic review
Rhodes 1980	not randomised, subjects not depressed
Rief 1996	non-randomised controlled trial
Roth 1986	subjects had a high number of life events, not depression
Roth 1987	no outcome measure of depression
Sachs 1981	non systematic review
Sachs 1982	non systematic review
Salminen 2005	Coronary heart disease patients with no separation of those with depressive symptoms. Intervention described by authors as health advocacy, counselling and activation programme
Salmon 1990	non systematic review

(Continued)

Salmon 2001	non systematic review
Sanstead 1983	not randomised
Scully 1998	non systematic review
Sexton 1989	comparing different types of exercise with no non-exercising group
Simons 1985	non systematic review
Skrinar 2005	DSM IV or psychotic disorders. no separation
Sonstroem 1997	non systematic review
Stein 1989	no non-exercising control
Stein 1992	not described as randomised. Did not have to be depressed to participate
Stern 1983	trial in patients with myocardial infarction
Stewart 1994	non-randomised controlled trial
Taylor 1986	trial in patients with myocardial infarction
Tenorio 1986	trial in subclinical depression
TREAD 2004	ongoing trial comparing two intensities of exercise
Tsang 2003	Subjects had chronic physical disease not depression
Van Coppenolle 1993	non systematic review
Van De Vliet 2003	single study design
van der Merwe 2004	intervention was a manual based therapy programme not exercise
Veale 1992 b	Comparison of two different types of exercise
Weinstein 1983	non systematic review
Weiss 1989	not randomised
Weyerer 1994	non systematic review
Wieman 1980	jogging versus racket ball so no non-exercising control
Williams 1979	Non randomised study

(Continued)

Williams 1986	non-randomised controlled trial
Williams 1992	aerobic versus low intensity exercise. No control

### Characteristics of ongoing studies [ordered by study ID]

#### DEMO 2007

Trial name or title	A Randomised parallel-group observer-blinded clinical trial of aerobic versus non-aerobic versus relaxation training for patients with light to moderate depression
Methods	
Participants	Diagnosis of depression, aged 18-55 years, 135 expected
Interventions	Progressive resistance training vs aerobic training vs relaxation training (control), all twice a week for 4 months
Outcomes	Hamilton Depression scale (primary outcome), secondary outcomes include other measures of mood, cognitive testing, biochemistry (cortisol and prolactin) and quality of life
Starting date	2005
Contact information	Dr J Krogh Psychiatric department, Bispebjerg Hospital, Copenhagen Denmark jk27@bbh.hosp.dk
Notes	due to complete in September 2008

#### McClure 2008

Trial name or title	Step Up Wellness Program for Depression, physical Inactivity and Smoking
Methods	
Participants	Moderate depressive symptoms and current smoker
Interventions	Walking group 3 times a week for 3 months plus weekly phone calls vs usual care
Outcomes	depressive symptoms, physical activity and smoking quit attempts
Starting date	November 2008
Contact information	Jennifer McClure Group Health Center for Health studies, Seattle, Washington 98101
Notes	

**OPERA 2008**

Trial name or title	Older people's exercise intervention in residential and nursing accommodation
Methods	
Participants	Residents of nursing and residential homes
Interventions	Active intervention (group based exercise run biweekly and promotion of physical activity) vs depression awareness programme for 12 months
Outcomes	Primary outcome: geriatric depression scale Secondary outcomes include quality of life, mobility, cognitive function, pain falls, hospital admission and medication use
Starting date	January 2008
Contact information	Professor Martin Underwood, Centre for Health Sciences, Abernethy Building, Barts and the London NHS Trust, Whitechapel, London
Notes	Cluster RCT (approximately 1000 residents of 80 residential and nursing homes)

**Peacock 2006**

Trial name or title	A feasibility study to analyse the psychological benefits of green exercise in comparison to cognitive behavioural therapy with patients with mild to moderate depression
Methods	
Participants	Reactive, mild to moderate depression
Interventions	Green exercise (a series of short countryside walks over a 6 week period) vs CBT
Outcomes	Beck Depression Inventory
Starting date	March 2006
Contact information	Ms J Peacock, University of Essex, Centre for Environment and Society, Colchester, UK jlpeac@essex.ac.uk
Notes	

**UPBEAT 2006**

Trial name or title	Understanding the prognostic benefits of exercise and antidepressant therapy (UPBEAT)
Methods	
Participants	Coronary heart disease and persistent depressive symptoms

**UPBEAT 2006** (Continued)

Interventions	Supervised exercise vs antidepressant vs placebo for 16 weeks
Outcomes	Mood, heart function
Starting date	July 2006
Contact information	James A Blumenthal blume003@mc.duke.edu
Notes	

## DATA AND ANALYSES

### Comparison 1. Exercise versus control

Outcome or subgroup title	No. of studies	No. of participants	Statistical method	Effect size
1 Reduction in depression symptoms post treatment	23	907	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.82 [-1.12, -0.51]
2 Reduction in depression symptoms follow-up	5	218	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.44 [-0.71, -0.18]

### Comparison 2. Exercise versus cognitive therapy

Outcome or subgroup title	No. of studies	No. of participants	Statistical method	Effect size
1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment	6	152	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.17 [-0.51, 0.18]

### Comparison 3. Exercise versus bright light therapy

Outcome or subgroup title	No. of studies	No. of participants	Statistical method	Effect size
1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment	1	18	Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-6.4 [-10.20, -2.60]

### Comparison 4. Exercise versus antidepressants

Outcome or subgroup title	No. of studies	No. of participants	Statistical method	Effect size
1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment	2	201	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.04 [-0.31, 0.24]

**Comparison 5. Exercise versus control: subgroup analysis - type of exercise**

Outcome or subgroup title	No. of studies	No. of participants	Statistical method	Effect size
1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment	23		Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	Subtotals only
1.1 Aerobic exercise	17	640	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.63 [-0.95, -0.30]
1.2 Mixed exercise	4	198	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-1.47 [-2.56, -0.37]
1.3 Resistance exercise	2	69	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-1.34 [-2.07, -0.61]

**Comparison 6. Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses**

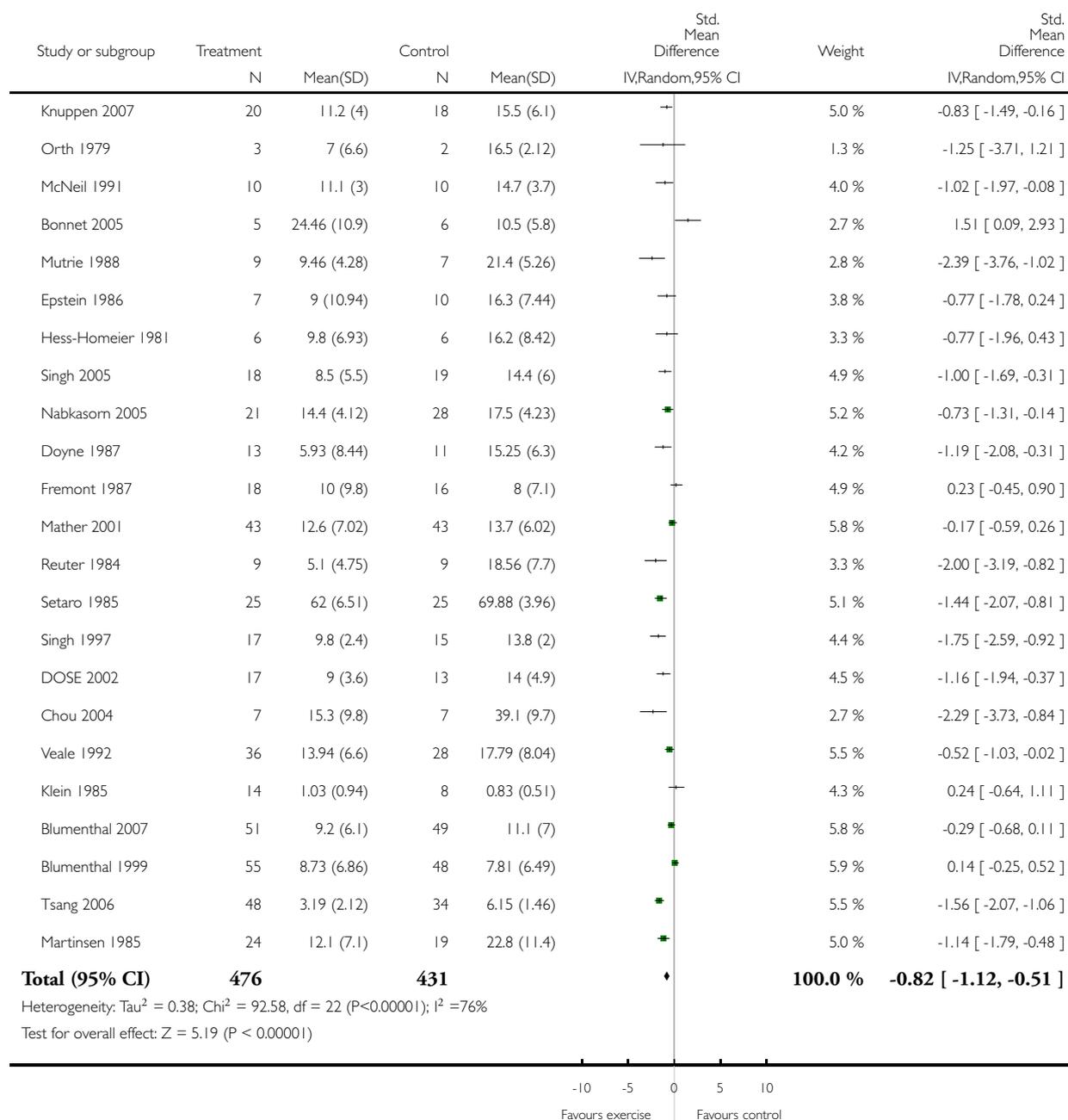
Outcome or subgroup title	No. of studies	No. of participants	Statistical method	Effect size
1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: peer reviewed journal publications and doctoral theses only	21	867	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.66 [-0.95, -0.37]
2 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies published as abstracts or conference proceedings only	2	34	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-2.17 [-3.06, -1.27]
3 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies with adequate allocation concealment	8	430	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.77 [-1.12, -0.42]
4 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies using intention to treat analysis	9	403	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.63 [-1.16, -0.10]
5 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies with blinded outcome assessment	7	418	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.39 [-0.75, -0.03]
6 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: allocation concealment, ITT, blinded outcome	3	216	Std. Mean Difference (IV, Random, 95% CI)	-0.42 [-0.88, 0.03]

### Analysis 1.1. Comparison 1 Exercise versus control, Outcome 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post treatment.

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 1 Exercise versus control

Outcome: 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post treatment

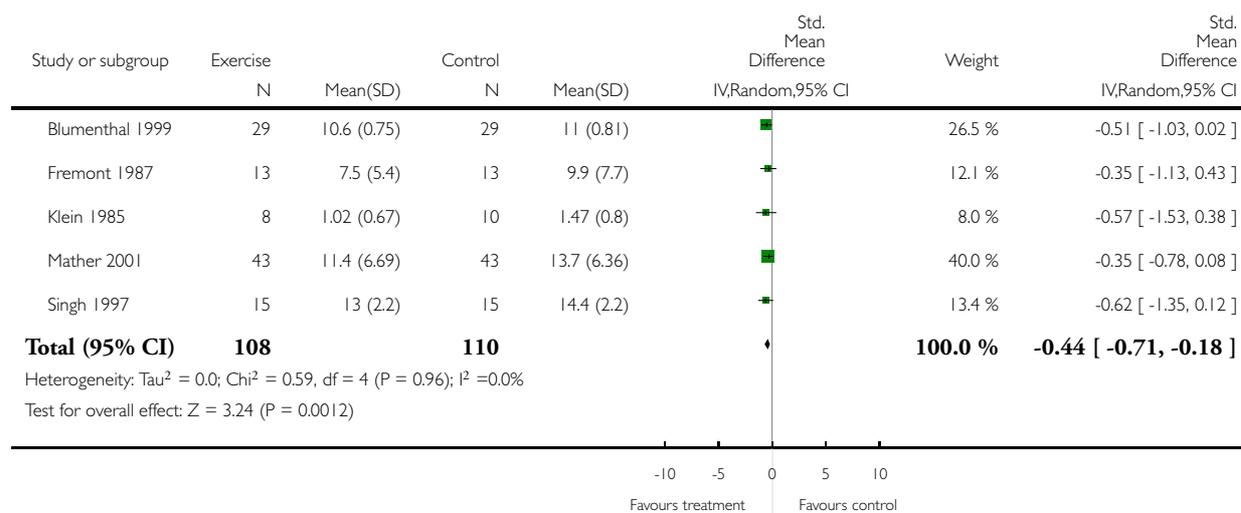


## Analysis 1.2. Comparison 1 Exercise versus control, Outcome 2 Reduction in depression symptoms follow-up.

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 1 Exercise versus control

Outcome: 2 Reduction in depression symptoms follow-up

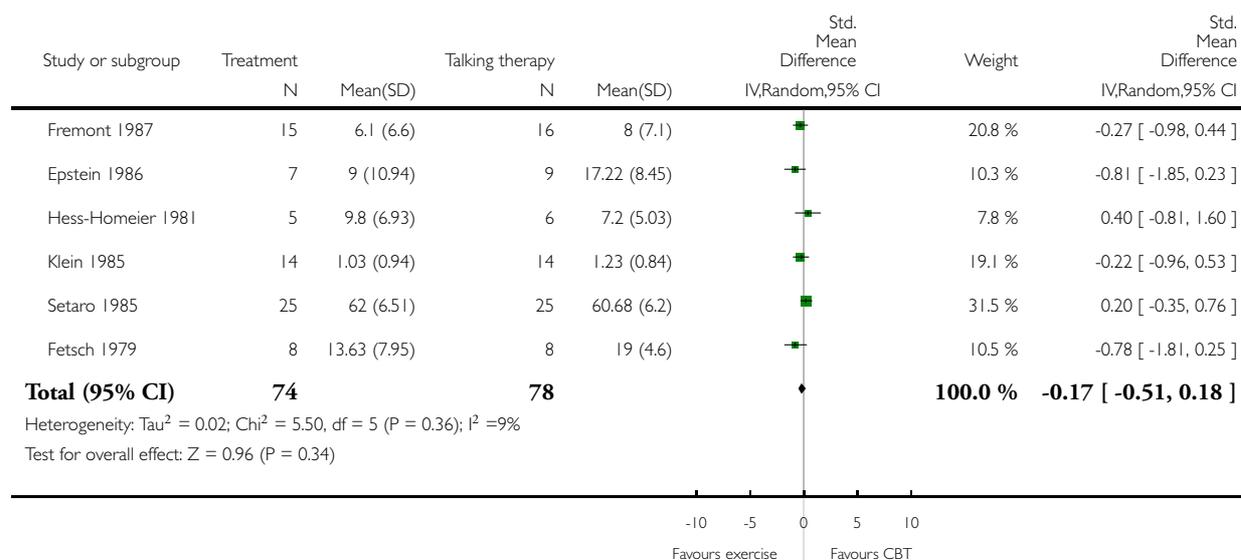


### Analysis 2.1. Comparison 2 Exercise versus cognitive therapy, Outcome 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment.

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 2 Exercise versus cognitive therapy

Outcome: 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment

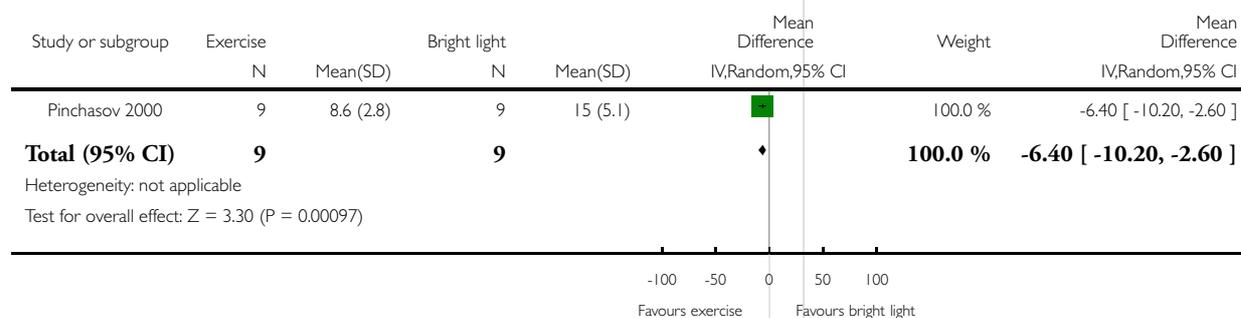


### Analysis 3.1. Comparison 3 Exercise versus bright light therapy, Outcome 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment.

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 3 Exercise versus bright light therapy

Outcome: 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment

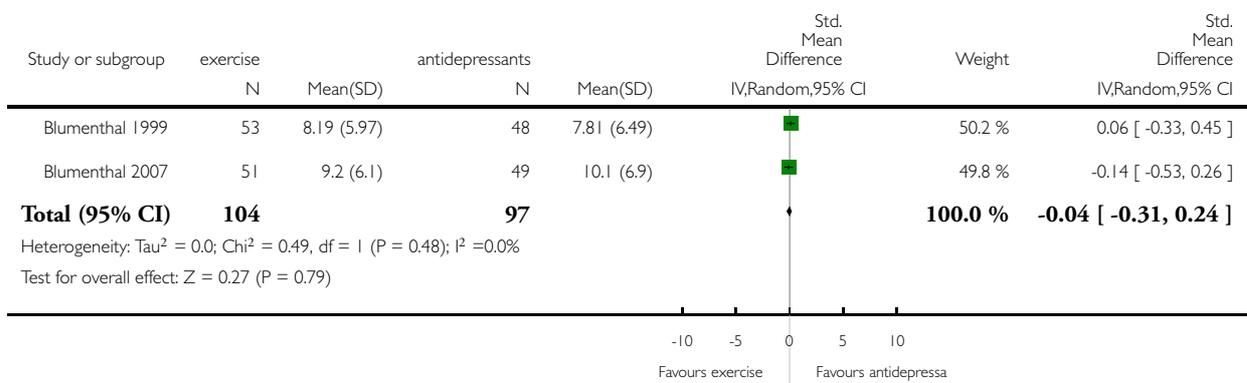


**Analysis 4.1. Comparison 4 Exercise versus antidepressants, Outcome 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment.**

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 4 Exercise versus antidepressants

Outcome: 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment

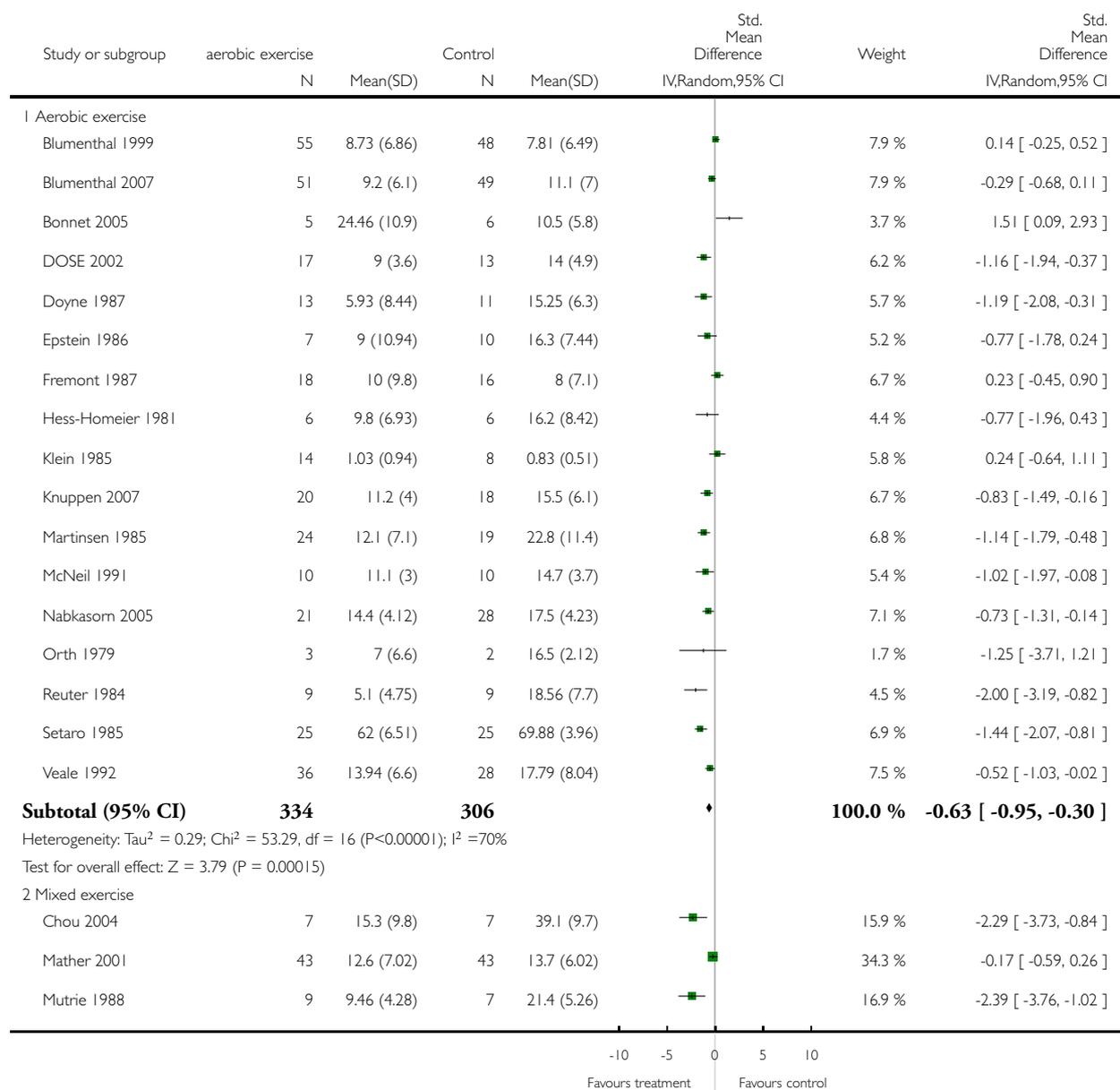


### Analysis 5.1. Comparison 5 Exercise versus control: subgroup analysis - type of exercise, Outcome 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment.

Review: Exercise for depression

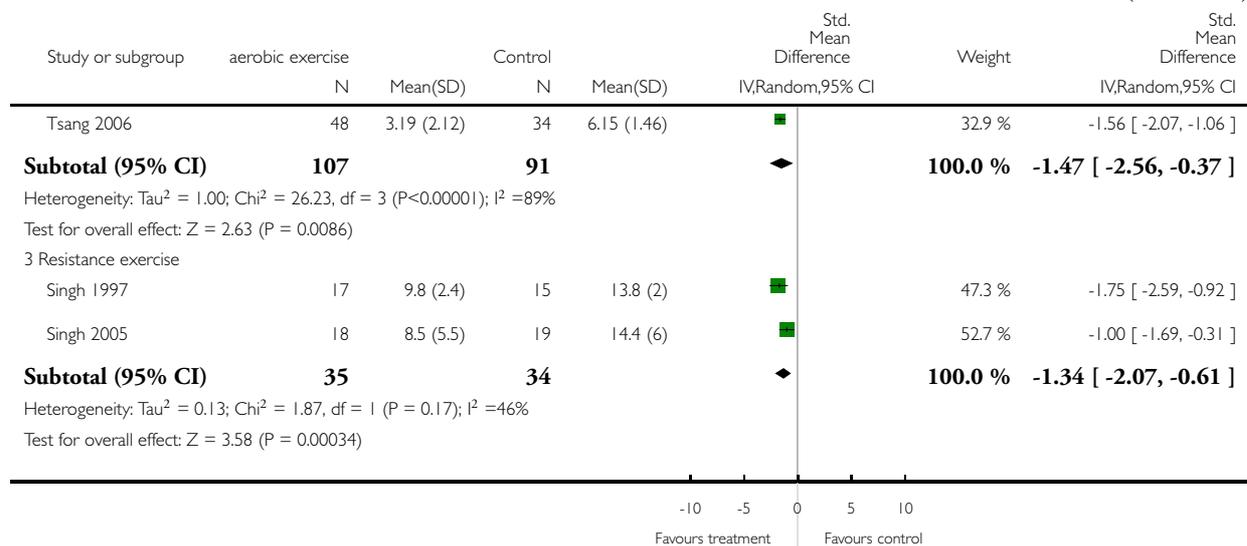
Comparison: 5 Exercise versus control: subgroup analysis - type of exercise

Outcome: 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment



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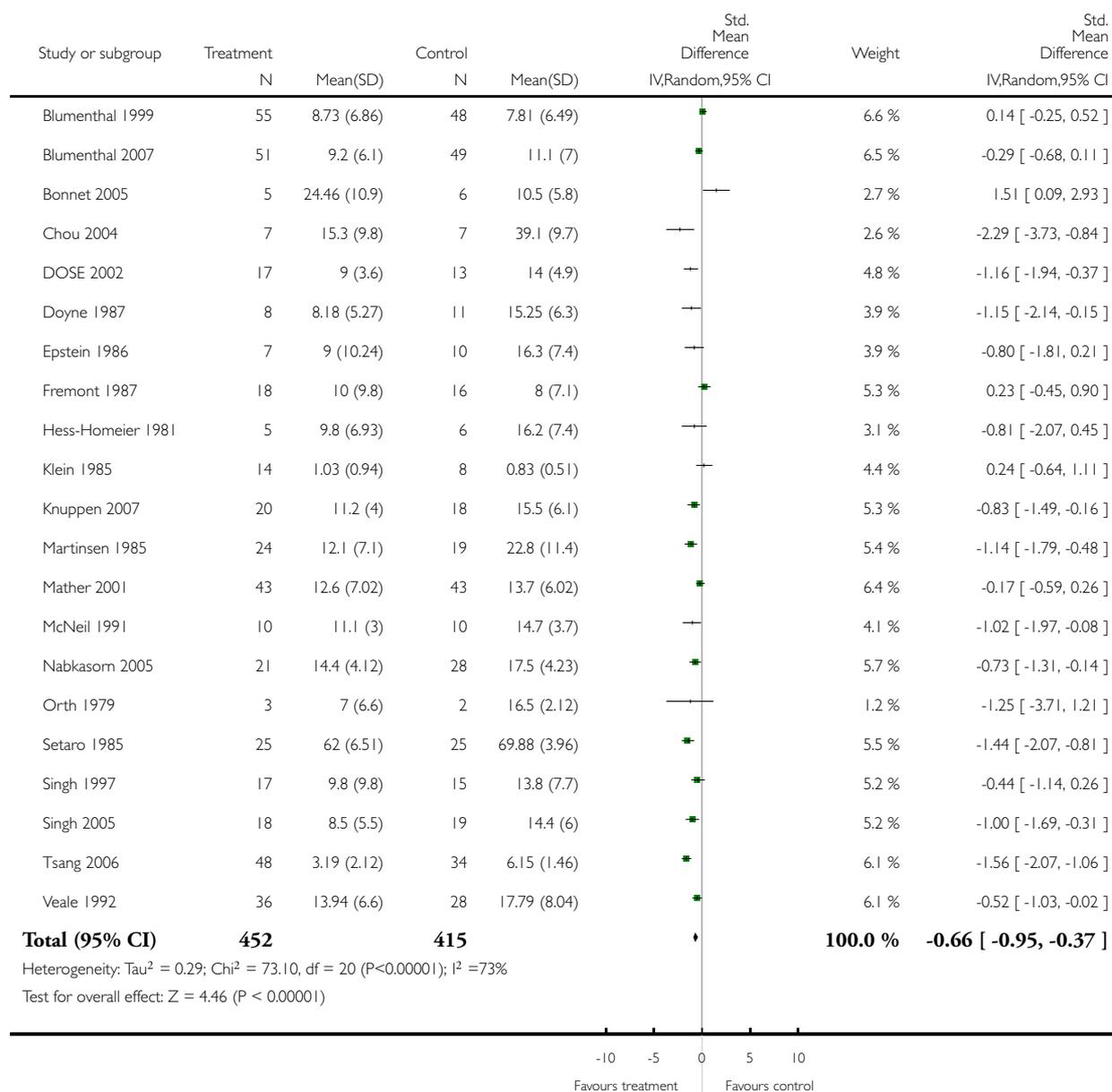


### Analysis 6.1. Comparison 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses, Outcome 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: peer reviewed journal publications and doctoral theses only.

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses

Outcome: 1 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: peer reviewed journal publications and doctoral theses only

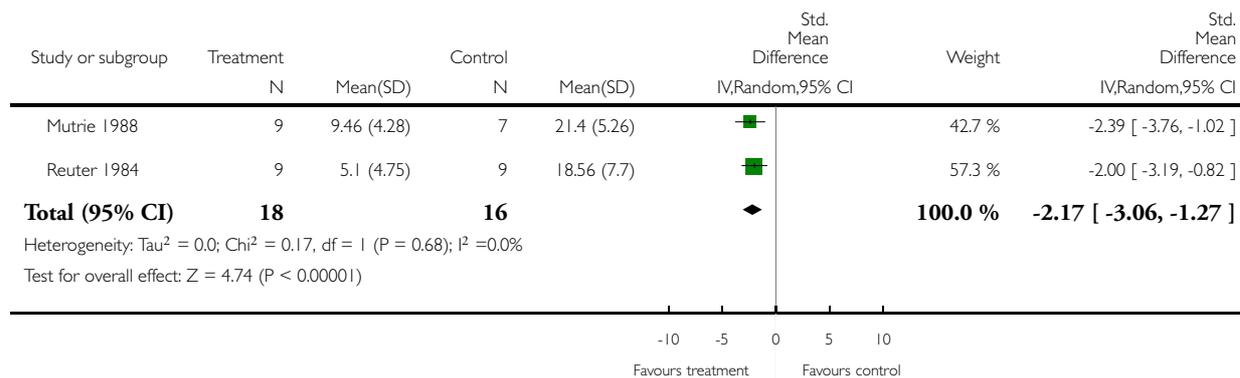


**Analysis 6.2. Comparison 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses, Outcome 2 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies published as abstracts or conference proceedings only.**

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses

Outcome: 2 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies published as abstracts or conference proceedings only

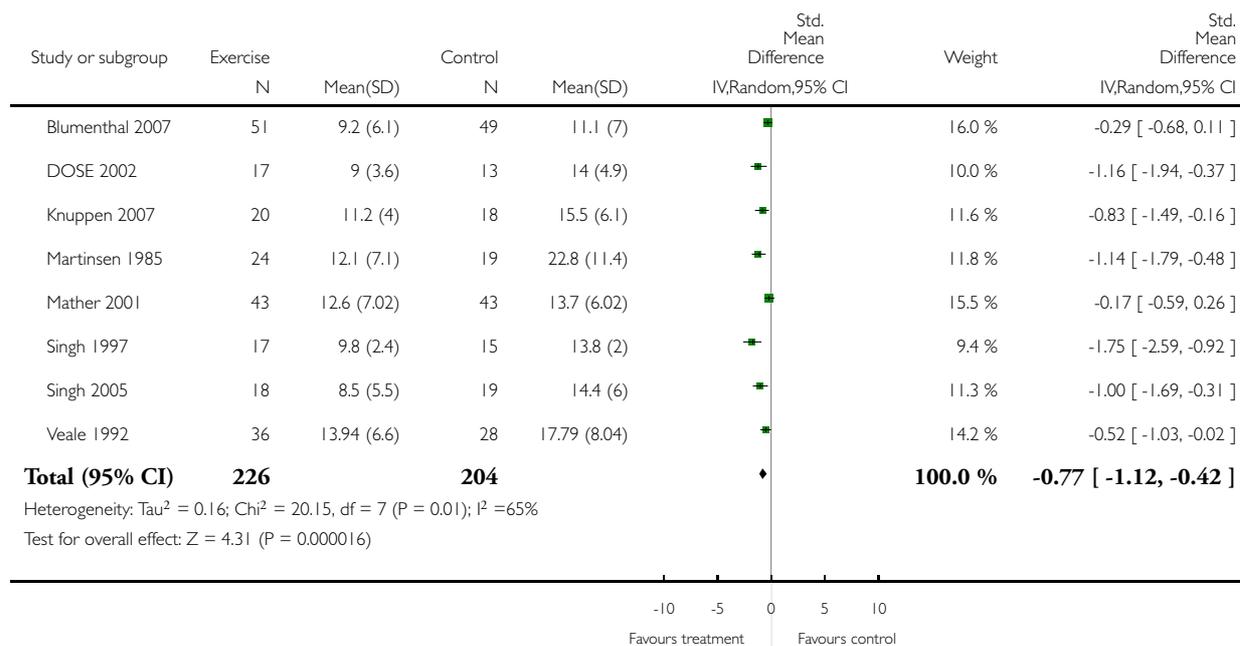


**Analysis 6.3. Comparison 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses, Outcome 3 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies with adequate allocation concealment.**

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses

Outcome: 3 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies with adequate allocation concealment

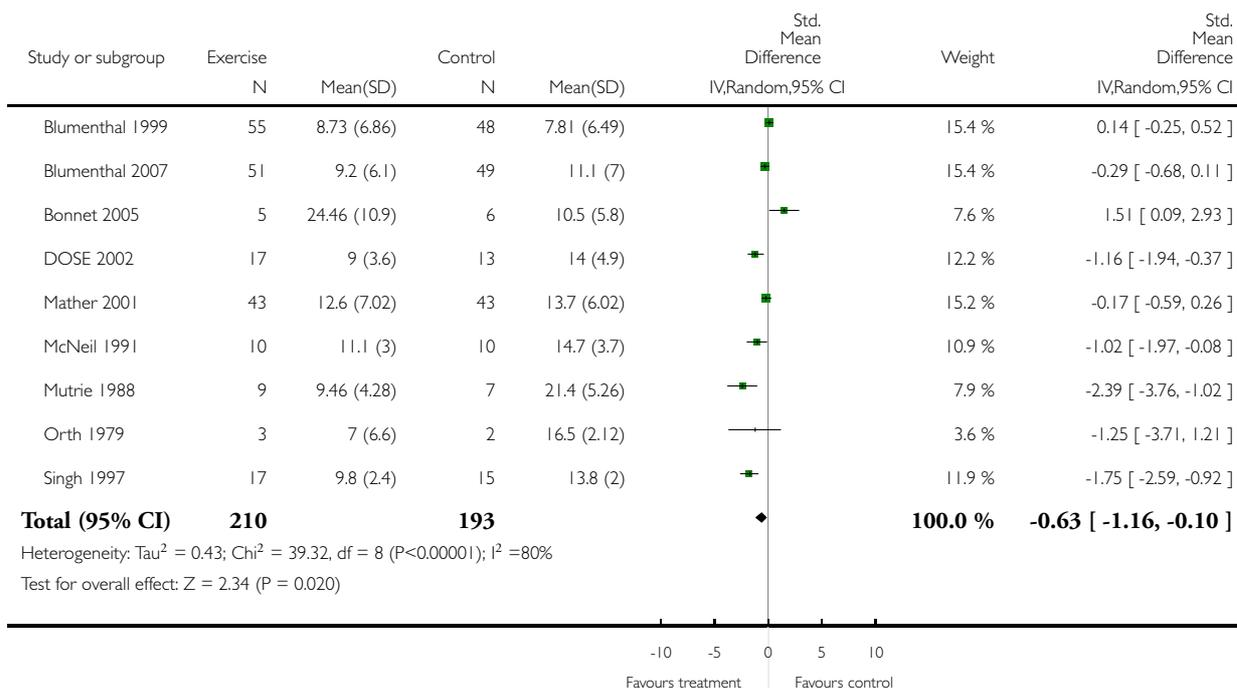


**Analysis 6.4. Comparison 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses, Outcome 4 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies using intention to treat analysis.**

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses

Outcome: 4 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies using intention to treat analysis

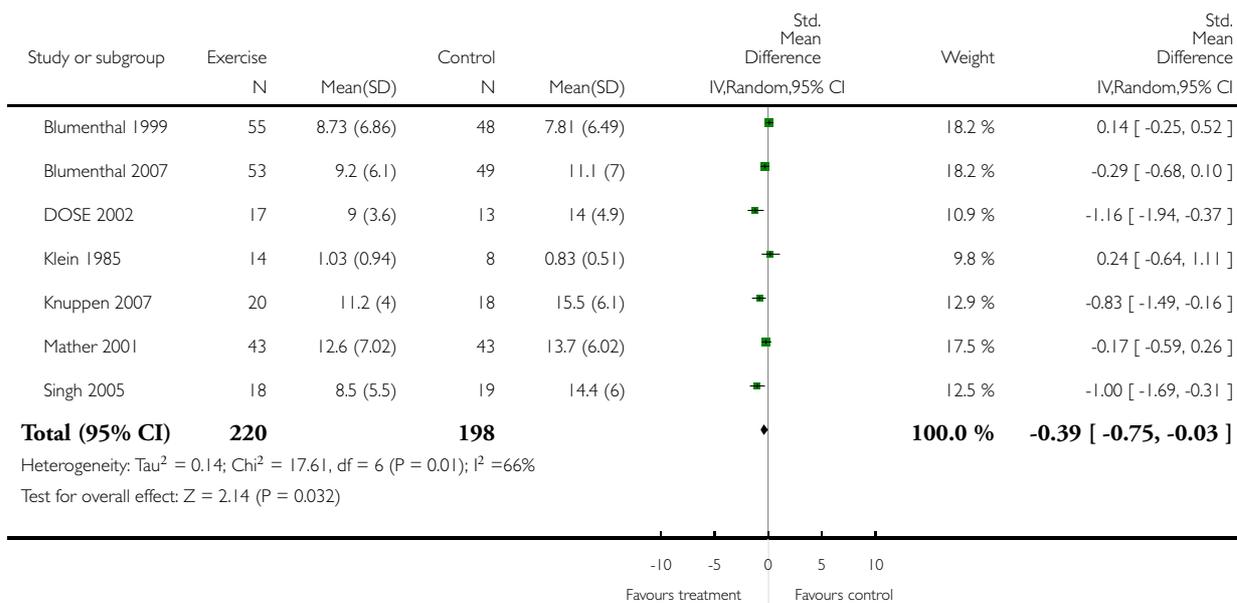


**Analysis 6.5. Comparison 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses, Outcome 5 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies with blinded outcome assessment.**

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses

Outcome: 5 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: studies with blinded outcome assessment

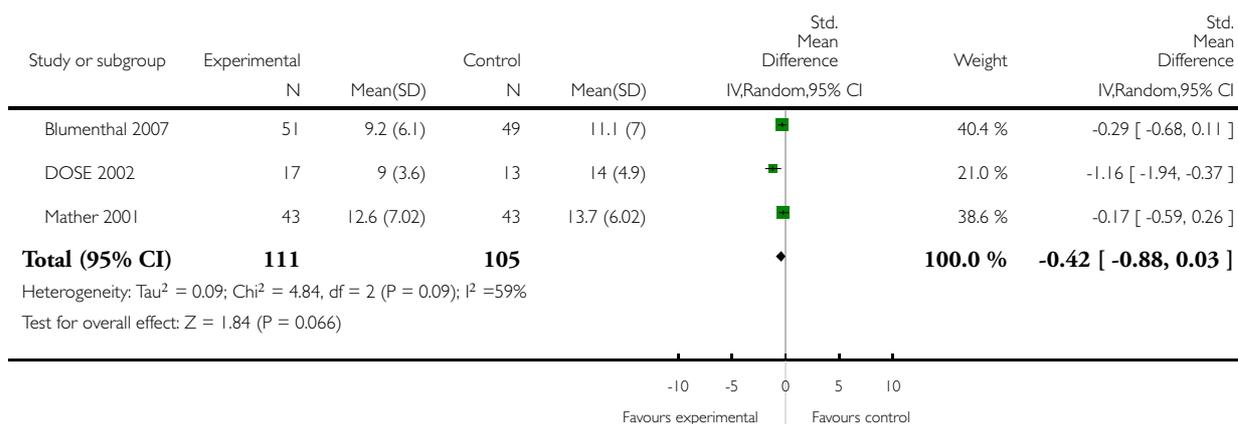


**Analysis 6.6. Comparison 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses, Outcome 6 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: allocation concealment, ITT, blinded outcome.**

Review: Exercise for depression

Comparison: 6 Exercise versus control: sensitivity analyses

Outcome: 6 Reduction in depression symptoms post-treatment: allocation concealment, ITT, blinded outcome



**ADDITIONAL TABLES**

**Table 1. Number screened, number still in trial and exercise intervention at end of trial**

Trial ID	screened	randomised	allocated exercise	completed trial	completed exercise
Blumenthal 1999	604 underwent tele- phone screening	156	55	133	46
Bonnet 2005	not reported	11	5	7	3
Chou 2004	30	14	7	not reported	not reported
DOSE 2002	1664 assessed for el- igibility	80	17	45	11
Doyne 1987	285 responded to adverts	57	not reported	24	13
Epstein 1986	250 telephone in- quiries received	33	7	not reported	7
Fetsch 1979	not reported	21	10	16	8

**Table 1. Number screened, number still in trial and exercise intervention at end of trial** (Continued)

Fremont 1987	72 initially expressed an interest	61	21	49	18
Greist 1979	not reported	28	10	22	8
Hess-Homeier 1981	not reported	17	5	not reported	not reported
Klein 1985	209 responded to an advertisement	74	27	42	15
Knuppen 2007	not reported	39	20	35	19
Martinsen 1985	not reported	43	24	37	20
Mather 2001	1185 referred or screened	86	43	86	43
McCann 1984	250 completed BDI, 60 contacted	47	16	43	15
McNeil 1991	82	30	10	30	10
Mutrie 1988	24	24	9	24	9
Nabkasorn 2005	266 volunteers screened	59	28	49	21
Orth 1979	17	11	3	7	3
Pinchasov 2000	not reported	18	9	not reported	not reported
Reuter 1984	not reported	not reported	9	not reported	9
Setaro 1985	211 responses to advertisement	180	30	150	25
Singh 1997	letters sent to 2953 people, 884 replied	32	17	32	17
Singh 2005	451	60	20	54	18
Tsang 2006	not reported	82	56	82	48
Veale 1998	not reported	83	48	57	36
Blumenthal 2007	457	202	51 (supervised), 53 home based	183	45 (supervised), 51 home-based

## **F E E D B A C K**

### **Concerning the DOSE 2002 trial, 3 November 2009**

#### **Summary**

I recently read [the] review entitled "Exercise for Depression" and would like to point out some errors in your review. First, you stated the following in your review,

"We attempted to extract data on intensity of exercise but this was reported for only a few trials, and there was too much variation in other aspects of the trial methodologies to attribute differences in outcomes to differences exercise intensities. One of the included trials compared four different 'doses' of aerobic exercise (DOSE 2002) and found that high intensity exercise was more effective than low intensity exercise."

In actuality, participants were allowed to self-select intensity and the two factors that were manipulated were frequency of exercise and total energy expenditure. It was the total energy expenditure that seemed to have a great effect on reduction of symptoms when the low dose was compared with the higher dose.

Second, the study is not cited correctly throughout the article and finally I am not sure why the main results paper was not included in this review because it was published in 2005. What was included was our baseline design paper that had no results.

I would like to see this error corrected in the review.

Andrea L. Dunn, PhD

#### **Reply**

Reply of Dr Gillian Mead, 10 November 2009

The 2005 paper is now cited as well as the 2002 paper.

The purpose of our review was to determine the effectiveness of exercise for depression. Thus we included trials which compared exercise with 'no treatment' and trials which compared exercise to other treatments for depression e.g. CBT. Our conclusions were that

'It is reasonable to recommend exercise to people with depressive symptoms and to those who fulfil diagnostic criteria for depression....'

I agree... that it would be misleading if people with depression and researchers were given the impression that exercise had to be intense to bring about benefits. Based on our subgroup analyses, we have stated that 'we cannot give people accurate information about how

effective exercise might be, nor can recommendations be made about the relative benefits of aerobic exercise, resistance exercise or mixed

exercise, whether group or individual exercises are better, nor about the optimum duration of exercise'. We then go on to say that further research is required.

[Concerning intensity within the DOSE study] - text has been added for clarification in both the 'Description of studies' and the 'Discussion'.

#### **Contributors**

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## WHAT'S NEW

Last assessed as up-to-date: 25 March 2007.

Date	Event	Description
12 November 2009	Feedback has been incorporated	Feedback received from a triallist received 3 November 2009 concerning the DOSE 2002 study was addressed on 10 November 2009

## HISTORY

Protocol first published: Issue 3, 2003

Review first published: Issue 4, 2008

Date	Event	Description
13 May 2009	New citation required but conclusions have not changed	Incorrect 'date assessed as up to date' changed from February 2000 to March 2007 (date of last electronic searches). Abstract corrected to reflect true history of searches
13 August 2008	New search has been performed	This is an updated version of a previous review published in the BMJ in 2001 and includes several new trials
30 July 2008	Amended	Converted to new review format
21 February 2000	New citation required and conclusions have changed	Substantive amendment

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORS

This review is based on a previously published BMJ review by Debbie Lawlor and Stephen Hopker. The review was updated and modified by Dr Mead, with contributions from Dr Morley, Dr Greig, Dr Campbell and Professor McMurdo

## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Professor McMurdo is co-director of D.D. Developments, a University of Dundee not-for-profit organisation which provides exercise classes for older people.

## **SOURCES OF SUPPORT**

### **Internal sources**

- NHS Lothian, University of Edinburgh, UK.

### **External sources**

- No sources of support supplied

## **INDEX TERMS**

### **Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)**

\*Exercise; Depression [\*therapy]; Randomized Controlled Trials as Topic; Treatment Outcome

### **MeSH check words**

Adult; Humans; Middle Aged; Young Adult