

Protocol for EXERCISE THERAPY

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Beyond the many documented psychological advantages of aerobic exercise, there is strong anecdotal evidence that even greater benefit can be derived by exercising in combination with prescribed expressive and cognitive procedures. Using a certain mindset, the reprocessing of either memories or fears while exercising appears to reduce their emotional tone. (While ideal for reducing the negative emotions of fear and anger, hurt and sad feelings seem less appropriate to this process.)

The following protocol has been formulated and used by hundreds of clients with a remarkable rate of success and positive feedback.

Underlying principles:

- Improved mood states can be attained by a combination of awareness and the constructive expression of feelings in ways that aren't hurtful to others.
- Taking responsibility for feelings without blame and allowing emotional release can facilitate greater acceptance and forgiveness.
- Giving voice to strong negative feelings in a safe or neutral environment can create a shift of attachment and upset.
- For anger reduction, this process can be construed as an adult form of temper tantrum where you "get to get" mad at situations,— not people. e.g. "I don't like what he said." For those holding the mistaken notion that anger is harmful to others, sending thoughts of forgiveness to the targets of their upset can facilitate more willingness to engage in the protocol.
- As a means of reducing irrational fears, it helps to forcefully get mad at the unwanted thoughts and fears—telling them to go away.

Essential conditions:

One pre-condition of this tool is to engage in a form of exercise that's "safe." The primary focus of attention—90% of your "hard drive"—needs to be on the upsets that you'd like to resolve rather than being concerned with physical safety.

Excellent choices include jogging, swimming, stair climbing and any forms of exercise where you can hold on to bars, like treadmills or stationary bikes. Most people find benefit by closing their eyes when possible.

You wouldn't want to do this process while hiking if you have to be concerned about your footing. Equally problematic would be riding a bicycle thirty miles an hour on a straightaway so as to get your heart rate into an aerobic zone.

It's also less effective to do this procedure in social settings like exercise classes or working out with a friend, each of which hinder your ability to have sustained internal focus.

Procedures:

This process alternates five-minute periods of aerobic exercise with one-minute periods of more vigorous exertion.

1. Start with a five-minute warm-up into your aerobic zone. While doing so:
 - a. Identify the upset you want to focus on.
 - b. Name the feeling in connection with the situation (e.g.-anger or fear.)
 - c. On a scale of 1-10, quantify the intensity of that feeling (10 being the most upset.)
2. For one minute, increase your heart rate 10% by exercising more vigorously. While doing so, scream in your head what you'd like to say about that upset, right from your gut and without editing. Profanities work wonders. See yourself on top of the world screaming and dictating how you'd like things to be, (while ironically at the same time fully realizing that you don't really have the wisdom to know what's best.)
3. Shift back to five minutes of continued aerobics, now taking huge deep breaths and forceful exhalations that further release tension and replenish your oxygen. Now re-evaluate the intensity of your original upset on a scale of

1-10. If your level of upset has subsided only a little, you may want to “rinse and repeat” with the same issue by using the steps in #1.

Another option to consider next is to focus upon whatever else pops into your head that may be symbolically associated to your original upset. The nature of the “emotional brain” is such that it can easily shift attention toward previous circumstances and experiences. A focus on new material helps to clear those triggers as well.

4. Repeat step #2.

5. Repeat step #3, and so on.....

These steps can be repeated for whatever length of time you choose. Although lengthier sessions seem more effective, a quick release can be accomplished in six minutes. A series of five repetitions of steps #2 and #3 takes thirty minutes.

Regardless of how many repetitions, close out your entire session with a five-minute aerobic cool down. During this final segment, create an affirmation that contradicts the thoughts and feelings that were previously disturbing. Examples include: “I can handle this.” “This too shall pass.” “I can see peace instead of this.” “My life is in God’s hands.” “I can be happy no matter what.” “Who am I to judge?”

These new seeds of thought seem to sprout most effectively during the conclusion of the exercise process. Write down your affirmation and then post reminders to help you retain and practice this corrected mental outlook.

Hypothesis:

Just as EMDR is effective as a “relaxing” form of desensitization “exercise therapy” might best be construed as an expressive form of desensitization — perhaps by way of the creation of a brain state that helps provide a resolution of upsets.