



Research Article

Energetic activity for depression in young people aged 13–17 years: the READY feasibility RCT

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Plain language summary

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Depression in adolescents is a serious problem that can lead to poor mental health and stigma throughout a person's life. Antidepressants help some people but can have negative side effects. Research shows that adults with depression benefit from exercise, but it is unknown whether exercise is helpful for young people who are depressed. We wanted to find out whether it is possible to conduct a study examining the effect of exercise on depression in young people.

We recruited young people aged 13–17 years, diagnosed with depression, from three locations in the UK. Those suitable for exercise participated in one of three groups: (1) high-intensity exercise (e.g. circuit training), (2) low-intensity exercise (e.g. chair based) or (3) social activity (non-exercise-based activities, e.g. quizzes and board games).

Young people attended two 60-minute sessions per week for 12 weeks at local centres. Researchers collected data on mental health, session attendance and physical activity at the first session and at 14 and 26 weeks. We also asked some young people and staff about their experience in the study.

Fourteen young people took part, mostly completing the study in full. Over two-thirds of sessions were attended, and over 80% of questionnaires were completed.

We found that this study was acceptable to young people and to staff delivering the sessions. The small number of participants highlights the difficulties faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and reflects the challenges in reaching young people living with depression. We concluded that it is not possible to do a larger study with the current study design without finding out how to more effectively engage with young people with low mood.

Nevertheless, by talking to members of the public (e.g. young people and their parents/carers), providing exercise and social activity sessions in-person instead of online, and engaging with NHS and sports organisations, we believe that young people could be encouraged to take part in future studies of this type.