

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCHERS STUDY BENEFIT OF EXERCISE, MEDICATION ON DEPRESSION

DALLAS – Feb. 2, 2004 – Exercise is known to help relieve stress, boost spirits and fight symptoms of depression. But can a regular exercise routine combined with targeted medications actually *cure* major depressive disorder?

UT Southwestern researchers, partnering with The Cooper Institute in Dallas, hope to find an answer by studying how individuals treated with certain antidepressant medications respond to supervised exercise.

The study – funded by a \$2.4 million, four-year grant from the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) – focuses on individuals taking selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors, (SSRIs), who also participate in a 24-week exercise program. SSRIs are the most prescribed medications for depression and include such drugs as Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil and Celexa.

“The majority of people who start on an SSRI feel better after they begin treatment, but they still don’t feel completely well or as good as they did before they became depressed,” said Dr. Madhukar Trivedi, associate professor of psychiatry and head of the depression and anxiety disorders program at UT Southwestern. “While their symptoms are reduced, they seldom get to full remission.”

Preliminary results indicate positive responses from patients, said Dr. Trivedi, who received the NIMH grant after being awarded a \$100,000 grant from the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression earlier in 2003, which allowed him to gather pilot data for the study.

“Exercise may have a synergistic or additive effect combined with anti-depressant medication, which could provide significant benefits over singular treatment methods,” he said. “There also is some suggestion that exercise can change neurotransmitter levels, like those of serotonin, in the brain. These changes in neurochemicals have been reported to help improve symptoms of depression. Plus, we already know that exercise can have a positive effect on a

(MORE)

DEPRESSION STUDY – 2

person's overall health and well-being.

“The goal of this study is to determine if exercise can help augment the SSRI treatment to the point of reducing *all* the symptoms of depression.”

UT Southwestern currently is enrolling study participants between the ages of 18 and 65 who have been taking an SSRI for eight to 12 weeks and are continuing to experience symptoms of depression. Interested persons should call 214-648-0173. Eligible participants will begin an exercise program at The Cooper Institute, located at 12230 Preston Road, as well as being trained on how to exercise at home.

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