

Extra exercise helps depressed smokers kick the habit faster

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

People diagnosed with depression need to step out for a cigarette twice as often as smokers who are not dealing with a mood disorder. And those who have the hardest time shaking off the habit may have more mental health issues than they are actually aware of.

Those insights were among the collective findings recently published in

the journal *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* by a team of researchers based in part at Concordia University.

While nearly one in five North American adults are regular [smokers](#), a figure that continues to steadily decline, about 40 per cent of depressed people are in need of a regular drag. The statistic motivated the researchers to investigate what was behind that higher percentage.

The findings revealed that those who struggle with mental illness simply have a tougher time quitting, no matter how much they want to. The anxiety, cravings or lack of sleep that accompany typical attempts to quit cold turkey will have them scrambling for the smokes they might have sworn off earlier that evening. A person without [clinical depression](#) is better equipped to ride things out.

Yet a bit more exercise has been shown to reduce the compulsion to reach for a cigarette—even if it is not enough to alleviate the symptoms of the depression itself.

Based on an 18-month study, quitting was found to be easier in the midst of even the most basic workouts, since withdrawal symptoms were reduced in the aftermath of regular walks.

"The review should be seen as a call to arms," says study co-author Grégory Moullec, a postdoctoral researcher affiliated with Concordia's Department of Exercise Science. "Our hope is that this study will continue to sensitize researchers and clinicians on the promising role of exercise in the treatment of both depression and smoking cessation," adds first author Paquito Bernard of the University of Montpellier in France.

As well, for those who are having a hard time giving up cigarettes, the research sheds light on how that struggle can reveal [depression](#) that has

not been adequately diagnosed.

Overall, investigations into how exercise can play a role in helping to quit smoking continue. Most people eager to break the [habit](#) would no doubt leap at the chance to shed their cravings through physical activity alone.

"We still need stronger evidence to convince policymakers," explains Moullec. "Unfortunately there is still skepticism about [exercise](#) compared to pharmacological strategies. But if we continue to conduct ambitious trials, using high-standard methodology, we will get to know which interventions are the most effective of all."

Provided by Concordia University

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