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Behavioural activation is very effective for depressive symptoms after one week

An Auckland based study recruited patients from the waiting room then randomised them to do a work/love/play questionnaire¹ followed by behavioural activation (BA) or usual care.²

BA usually consisted of doing some exercise, contacting a friend for a social engagement and doing something pleasurable. Each activity had to reach a 7/10 likelihood of doing it (where 10 means absolutely will do it) to be considered a workable option.

The average baseline PHQ 8 was just under 12 (moderate depressive symptoms) and, after one week, 46% of participants were in remission, while in the control group, this was 21% - an NNT of 4.

A systematic review of trials for depression found an NNT for behavioural activation for depression is 2.5 measured a week to a month after the interventions.³ This suggests that BA is the most effective treatment for depression/depressive symptoms.

References:

1. Work/love/play worksheet [View here](#)
2. FACT effectiveness in primary care; a single visit RCT for depressive symptoms. The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine (2021) [View here](#)

3. Behavioural activation for depression; an update of meta-analysis of effectiveness and sub group analysis. PLoS One (2014) [View here](#)

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