



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH: CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Prof Alexandra Parker**

Although the importance of movement for overall health and wellbeing has long been recognised, the relationship between physical activity and mental health is complex, bidirectional and driven by underlying mechanisms that require further examination to comprehensively understand. Two particular aspects of the relationship between physical activity and mental health will be explored in this presentation: 1) the clinical considerations of implementing physical activity interventions in mental health treatment; and 2) the mental health and wellbeing of elite athletes. Mental disorders account for the greatest global burden of disease of all health conditions. The rising level of physical inactivity in the general community is impacting on health and wellbeing by contributing to the onset of preventable, non-communicable diseases. This effect is even more pronounced in people who have a mental illness; demonstrating a reduced life expectancy, greater rates of preventable disease and lower engagement in healthy lifestyle behaviours, including physical activity, than the general population. Physical activity interventions for mental health have the potential to promote mental health and wellbeing through universal prevention, improve mental health difficulties through indicated or targeted prevention, and treat mental illness and prevent comorbid health problems with early intervention and treatments. The first part of this presentation will focus on the clinical considerations of integrating physical activity interventions into treatment as usual, with a focus on depression, anxiety and early intervention. The barriers and facilitators to implementing a physical activity intervention in a youth primary mental health setting will be identified and reviewed, from the perspective of mental health clinicians and the clients of the service. Future directions on further research and the delivery of physical activity interventions will be provided, including consideration of the appropriate workforce, treatment settings and modality of physical activity interventions. The second part of the presentation will focus on the mental health and wellbeing of elite athletes and the clinical considerations of specific stressors (e.g., performance, injury), transition to retirement and concussion for high-performance athletes. This examination will draw upon data from recent systematic reviews and explore recommendations for coaches, support staff and players/sportspeople.

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**Co-Presenters:** Prof Alexandra Parker, Dr Robert Stanton, Dr Megan Teychenne  
**Panel Practitioner:** Mrs Katherine Stewart  
**Session Chairperson:** Dr Simon Rosenbaum