Antidepressants vs. running: Which works better to fight depression?

Exercise has been dubbed “nature’s antidepressant” by doctors for years, and now a new study confirms the notion.

The finding follows a four-month look at the impact that running had on anxiety and depression when compared to a common antidepressant.

Among 140 depression patients, those who engaged in regular group running — meaning two or three 45-minute runs each week — actually saw their depression levels drop a bit more than those who took the popular SSRI medication escitalopram (Lexapro).

And those who treated their depression with exercise reaped an added reward, with improvements seen in their physical health as well.

That group, said study author Brenda Penninx, also “lost weight, improved fitness and reduced heart rate and blood pressure.” The medication group did not see those benefits.

There was one downside seen in the running group: The likelihood that a running patient stuck with the full exercise program was considerably lower than it was for patients who chose escitalopram. Somewhere between 52% and 58% of runners maintained their running routine throughout the study period, compared with 82% to 85% adherence in the medication group.

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