

Associations between simple behaviors and changes in anxiety and depressive symptoms – results from the RABSYPO study

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Read the study for free at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sjpmh.2024.08.003>

1. Maintaining a healthy/balanced diet and exercising regularly was associated with short- and long-term reductions of anxiety and depressive symptoms.



The study found that after eating healthy or doing physical activity, individuals felt more relaxed and less depressed both in the short and long term. These behaviors are associated with overall benefits and have been already recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO): <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/healthy-diet>, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240015128>

2. Reading an excess of negative news was associated with short- and long-term increases in anxiety and depressive symptoms.



The study, conducted during the aftermath of COVID-19, found that after excessive exposure to negative news, individuals felt more anxious and depressed both in the short and long term. The WHO also recommended minimizing exposure to COVID-19 news causing anxiety or distress: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>

3. Spending time outdoors was associated with short- and long-term reductions of anxiety and depressive symptoms.



The study found that after staying outdoors, individuals felt more relaxed and less depressed both in the short and long term. Trusted publishers of expert health information, such as The Mayo Clinic Press, also recommend spending time outdoors: <https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/mental-health/the-mental-health-benefits-of-nature-spending-time-outdoors-to-refresh-your-mind/>

4. Engaging in relaxing activities was associated with short-term reductions of anxiety.



The study found that after doing calming activities (nearly) every day, individuals felt more relaxed in the short term. Previous meta-analyses have also found relaxation may decrease anxiety: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-022-00541-y>

5. Drinking water to hydrate was associated with short-term reductions of depressive symptoms.



The study found that after drinking water to hydrate, individuals felt less depressed in the short term. According to the recommendations by the European Food Safety Authority, the adequate water intake is about 2.5 l per day for males and 2 for females (more if pregnant or lactating): <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/1459>

6. Socializing with others was associated with long-term reductions of anxiety and depressive symptoms.



The study found that after interacting with people, individuals felt more relaxed and less depressed in the long term. This finding agrees with previous meta-analyses finding health benefits of having a good social connection structure. For instance: <https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.13072>