

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMBING

The WHY and HOW it can help

C/A/M
Climb Alongside Mental Health



1) CONFIDENCE THROUGH GOAL ACCOMPLISHMENT (MASTERY)

When you start out climbing, you can progress through the levels of difficulty quite quickly, which provides positive reinforcement. Often, people are surprised by how high, or the level of difficulty they've climbed, even on their first session.

2) MINDFULNESS

When climbing, you are forced to focus on what you are doing, on holding on and reaching for the next hold. You don't have time or space for your thoughts and worries to distract you from the present. In this way, climbing also provides a positive escape from life's stresses and struggles.



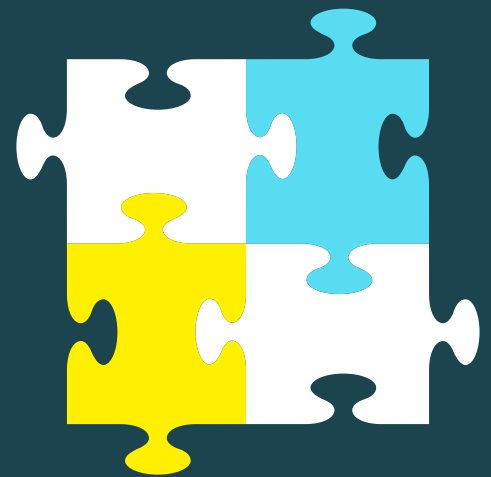
3) SOCIAL INTERACTIONS



Climbing is a social activity, although you can do it alone too. Climbers rely on each other for support, mentally, but also physically to make sure they stay safe. This is especially true when climbing with ropes, where the other person's life is literally in your hands. This helps build trusting relationships.

4) PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Shorter climbs, without ropes, are literally called 'boulder *problems*'. You have to solve them to climb them. As well as problem solving abilities, this also increases reflection skills, and the skill of learning from failure by trying out alternative approaches.



5) PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Climbing is a very good, and sneaky workout: it works all your major muscle groups, (not just your arms!), without feeling like you're 'working out'. Improving physical health is also known to improve mental health. Plus, feeling more physically able can increase body confidence.

6) CONNECTING WITH NATURE

If you go climbing outside, you have all the added benefits of being in, and connecting with nature. Climbing crags are often in beautiful locations; national parks, mountain regions, and areas of outstanding natural beauty.



7) IT'S FUN!

It's simply a fun way to spend some time. If you enter your local climbing wall, or outdoor crag, it's filled with people chatting, smiling, laughing, and generally having a good time.

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMBING

The Evidence

CLIMBING SPECIFIC

While there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence that people experience mental health benefits from climbing, the research area is still in its infancy. However, studies so far have found:

1) Inpatients with major depressive disorder participating in a one-off indoor climbing session experienced significant:

- increases in positive mood and coping emotions
- decreases in negative mood and depressiveness

2) An RCT of outpatients with depression participating in an 8-week bouldering & psychotherapy course experienced:

- significant reductions in depressive symptoms (compared to the control group)

3) Outpatients of a community MH service participating in 8, weekly climbing sessions, experienced:

- increased feelings of accomplishment, confidence, support seeking behaviours, peer support
- improved continuity of care
- increased individual progress

Furthermore, climbing is commonly prescribed and offered to hospital patients in Germany and France.



EXERCISE

It is well known, and documented, that exercise can be hugely beneficial to mental health, especially for depressive disorders(4). Exercise is commonly prescribed by GPs for the treatment of depression and other disorders(5).

MINDFULNESS



Reviews have shown that mindfulness interventions/techniques can be effective at reducing anxiety and other mood disorders (such as depression)(6), eating disorders(7), and sleep disturbances(8).



SOCIAL CONNECTION

Loneliness and social isolation are strongly linked with increased risk of mental health problems, as well as physical health issues (and even reduced life expectancy)(9,10). Thus, reducing social isolation is a step towards improved mental health.

NATURE



Being in nature incidentally, and directly engaging with nature are both shown to improve MH. Wilderness therapies have been widely used in psychiatric patients(11), and 'green prescriptions' are being trialled across the UK(12). Exercising in nature has been shown to improve self-esteem and mood(13).

1) Kleinstauder et al (2017) doi: 10.2147/PRBM.S143830; 2) Stelzer et al (2018) doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2018.e00580; 3) Cantrell et al (2016) doi: 10.1080/0164212X.2015.1111789; 4) Morgan et al (2013) Journal of Exercise Physiology Online; 5) www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/exercise-for-depression/; 6) Hofman et al (2010) doi: 10.1037/a0018555; 7) Wanen-Berghe et al (2010), doi: 10.1080/10640266.2011.533604; 8) Winbush et al (2007) doi: 10.1016/j.explore.2007.08.003; 9) Hawkey & Capitanio (2015) doi: 20140114 10) www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation; 11) Pretty (2004) doi: 10.1002/shi.220; 12) www.bma.org.uk/news/2019/july/natures-remedy-doctors-in-shetland-give-green-prescriptions; 13) Barton & Pretty (2010) doi: 10.1021/es903183r