

Evidence-Based Foundations of the Lift Your Mood: 14 Day Workout

The **14-day workout** is designed for individuals experiencing **mild depression or low mood**. These participants may struggle with feelings of sadness, lack of motivation, and difficulty engaging in daily activities, but they are still functioning in their daily lives. The program is not designed for those experiencing severe depression or acute mental health crises but rather for individuals who are in need of emotional support and guided actions to help improve their mood.

Characteristics of intended participants include:

- **Persistent low mood** but no severe impairment in functioning.
- Feelings of **disconnection** from pleasurable activities or people.
- Experiencing **emotional difficulties**, such as sadness, irritability, or lack of energy.
- Open to trying **evidence-based practices** like behavioural activation, gratitude, and cognitive reframing to improve mental wellbeing.
- Comfortable with reflective practices, including journaling and emotional check-ins.

The program offers accessible, daily actions that require only a small amount of effort, making it ideal for people who want to start taking steps toward improving their mental health but may not know where to begin.



THE SCIENCE OF MENTAL FITNESS

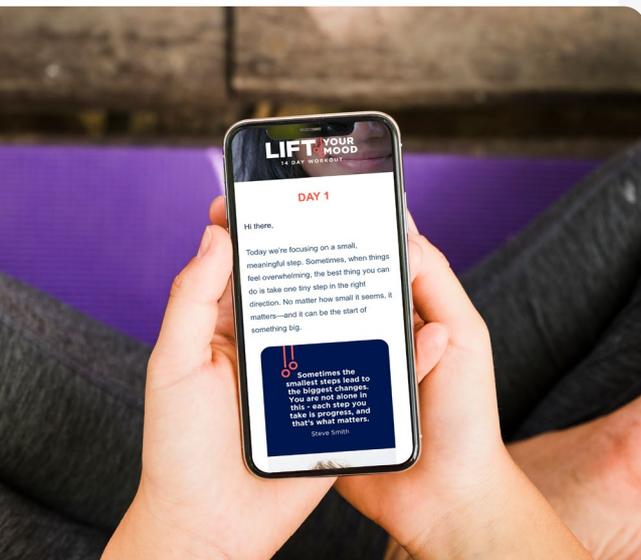
The Mental Fitness Gym takes an evidence-based approach to building mental fitness, equipping participants with the tools and inspiration to strengthen emotional muscles. Mental fitness refers to our capacity to cope with life's ups and downs, feel connected to others, and seek support when needed. Our approach centres on improving three proven mental health protective factors: emotional adaptability, social connectedness, and help-seeking behaviour.

Backed by research in psychology and behavioural science, the Mental Fitness Gym promotes preventative actions and habits to build mental fitness. Our research-driven approach supports people in managing mild mental health challenges while building sustainable habits for wellbeing.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The goal of this program is to improve participants' mental fitness by promoting small, evidence-based activities that can help alleviate feelings of low mood and mild depression. The intended outcomes of the program include:

- **Increased engagement in positive activities:** Through behavioural activation, participants are encouraged to take small but meaningful actions daily. These actions, such as physical movement, self-kindness, and social engagement, are designed to promote **positive behavioural patterns** and improve overall mood (Martell et al., 2010).



- **Improved emotional awareness and regulation:** Participants will develop greater awareness of their emotional states through daily feelings check-ins and reflective journaling. By recognising unhelpful thoughts and emotions, they will gain skills in **emotional regulation**, including the ability to challenge and reframe negative thought patterns (Beck, 1979).
- **Enhanced resilience and coping skills:** Participants will strengthen their resilience by focusing on past successes and cultivating gratitude. Research supports that focusing on progress and gratitude can improve emotional **resilience** and coping with stress (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).
- **Increased social connectedness:** The program emphasises the importance of **social support** by encouraging participants to reach out to friends, family, or professionals when needed. By reflecting on their social networks and the value of connection, participants will feel less isolated, which is a key component in managing low mood (Cohen & Wills, 1985).
- **Empowerment through self-efficacy:** By encouraging participants to celebrate small wins and progress, the program aims to improve **self-efficacy**, which is the belief in one's ability to make positive changes in their life. This sense of empowerment is critical in sustaining long-term emotional wellbeing (Bandura, 1997).
- **Increased likelihood of seeking professional help:** By the end of the 14 days, participants will have the tools to manage their mood, but if their low mood persists, they will be encouraged to seek professional support. The program emphasises that reaching out for help is a sign of strength and provides resources for ongoing mental health care.

OUR APPROACH

This 14-day workout program is rooted in a combination of **evidence-based psychological techniques** aimed at lifting mood and building mental fitness. The program incorporates elements of **behavioural activation, cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, and social support**, while also fostering reflection through **daily journaling and emotion check-ins**. Together, these components help participants develop actionable skills to manage mild depression and low mood.

Behavioural activation

Behavioural activation is central to the program, encouraging participants to engage in small, goal-directed activities each day. These manageable actions (such as taking a walk or organising a space) help disrupt the cycle of inactivity often associated with low mood. Research shows that **behavioural activation** is effective in improving depressive symptoms by reinforcing positive behaviours (Martell, Dimidjian, & Herman-Dunn, 2010).

Reference:

Martell, C. R., Dimidjian, S., & Herman-Dunn, R. (2010). Behavioral activation for depression: A clinician's guide. Guilford Press.



Cognitive reframing and emotional awareness

Participants are guided to identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts using **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** techniques. Through journaling prompts and reflection, they practise reframing negative thoughts, which is essential in **emotional regulation**. This program encourages participants to ask themselves whether a thought is helpful or true and to gently reframe it into something more constructive. CBT has been widely validated as an effective approach to improving mood through cognitive restructuring (Beck, 1979).

Reference:

Beck, A. T. (1979). Cognitive therapy of depression. Guilford Press.



Emotion check-ins and journaling

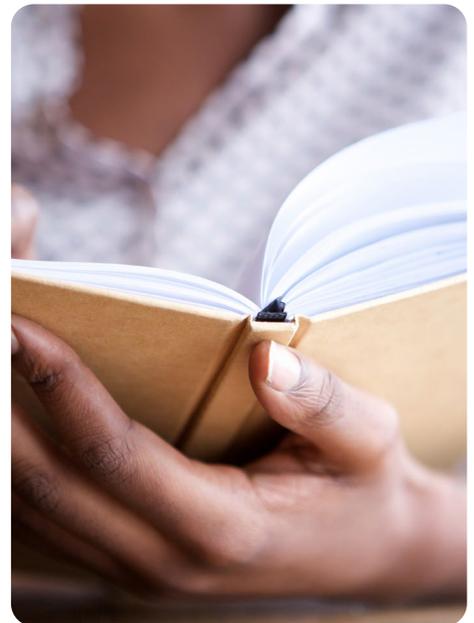
Daily **emotional check-ins** allow participants to gauge their mood (using a scale of 1-10) and track their emotional progress over the 14 days. Research shows that regular emotion tracking can enhance **emotional awareness** and help participants identify patterns in their mood (Gross & John, 2003).

Journaling provides a space for **self-reflection**, helping individuals to process their experiences and thoughts. Studies suggest that **expressive writing** can reduce depressive symptoms, improve mood, and promote psychological well being (Pennebaker, 1997). Journaling within this program serves as both a reflective tool and a form of emotional release.

References:

Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and wellbeing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 348-362.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science*, 8(3), 162-166.



Gratitude and positive reflection

Participants are introduced to **gratitude exercises**, which are proven to shift focus toward positive aspects of life. Research demonstrates that regular gratitude practices can improve emotional resilience and increase life satisfaction by promoting optimism and reframing stressful experiences (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Reference:

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective wellbeing in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389.



Social support and help-Seeking

The use of **Gotcha4Life ambassador quotes** serves as a key aspect of social support within the program. These personal, encouraging quotes provide participants with a sense of connection, normalising emotional struggles and highlighting the value of help-seeking. Social support is a known protective factor against stress and depression, as it fosters emotional resilience and decreases feelings of isolation (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Reference:

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310-357.



Self-efficacy and progress reflection

Throughout the program, participants are encouraged to celebrate **small wins** and reflect on their progress. This focus on gradual improvement fosters **self-efficacy**, the belief in one's ability to create positive change. Self-efficacy has been shown to improve motivation and emotional wellbeing, particularly in individuals working to overcome depression (Bandura, 1997).

Reference:

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.



Daily References

Day 1:

Behavioural activation, a key strategy in managing low mood, emphasises engaging in meaningful, goal-directed activities. Studies have shown that initiating small, manageable tasks can break the cycle of inactivity and improve mood over time.

Reference: Martell, C. R., Dimidjian, S., & Herman-Dunn, R. (2010). Behavioral activation for depression: A clinician's guide. Guilford Press.

Day 2:

Building mental fitness involves recognising and reinforcing the inner strength that comes from overcoming past challenges. Research shows that reflecting on these experiences can increase self-efficacy and emotional resilience.

Reference: Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2012). Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges. Cambridge University Press.

Day 3:

Social support is essential in managing stress and low mood. Numerous studies highlight the importance of supportive relationships in buffering against negative emotions and improving mental health.

Reference: Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. Psychological Bulletin, 98(2), 310-357.

Day 4:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques help individuals reframe their response to stressors and emotional triggers. Research shows that by choosing healthier responses, individuals can improve mood and emotional regulation.

Reference: Beck, A. T. (1979). Cognitive therapy of depression. Guilford Press.

Day 5:

Mindfulness-based interventions encourage individuals to focus on the present moment, which can help increase feelings of joy and reduce rumination on negative emotions.

Reference: Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2018). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression. Guilford Press.

Day 6:

Research shows that practising self-compassion—treating yourself with the same kindness you would offer a friend—can reduce anxiety and depression, and improve overall well being.

Reference: Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. Self and Identity, 2(2), 85-101.

Day 7:

Research shows that taking breaks and allowing time for rest can reduce stress, improve mood, and increase productivity over time.

Reference: Trougakos, J. P., Beal, D. J., Green, S. G., & Weiss, H. M. (2008). Making the break count: An episodic examination of recovery activities, emotional experiences, and positive affective displays. Academy of Management Journal, 51(1), 131-146.

Day 8:

Aerobic exercise promotes the release of endorphins, which act as natural mood enhancers. Research shows that regular physical activity can help improve emotional regulation and reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Reference: Schoenfeld, T. J., & Swanson, C. (2021). A runner's high for new neurons? Potential role for endorphins in exercise effects on adult neurogenesis. Biomolecules, 11(8), 1077. <https://doi.org/10.3390/biom11081077>

Day 9:

Acknowledging and validating emotions is a core component of emotional regulation, which can lead to improved mood and reduced anxiety.

Reference: Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and wellbeing. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(2), 348-362.

Day 10:

Research shows that focusing on progress rather than perfection can improve motivation and reduce anxiety, leading to greater overall wellbeing.

Reference: Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W.H. Freeman.

Day 11:

Research shows that practising gratitude can enhance wellbeing, increase positive emotions, and foster a greater sense of life satisfaction.

Reference: Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective wellbeing in daily life. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84(2), 377-389.

Day 12:

Research suggests that recognising and celebrating progress, no matter how small, can enhance motivation and emotional wellbeing.

Reference: Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W.H. Freeman.

Day 13:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) shows that reframing negative thoughts and challenging cognitive distortions can improve mood and emotional regulation.

Reference: Beck, A. T. (1979). Cognitive therapy of depression. Guilford Press.

Day 14:

Celebrating achievements, even small ones, can boost self-efficacy and motivation, which contributes to long-term success in maintaining positive habits and mental wellbeing. Studies have shown that recognising progress and reflecting on personal growth enhances resilience and emotional regulation.

References:

Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W.H. Freeman.

Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1990). Origins and functions of positive and negative affect: A control-process view. Psychological Review, 97(1), 19-35.



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Disclaimer

The information in our Mental Fitness Gym Workouts is not intended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Gotcha4Life does not provide counselling or crisis support services. You can connect with mental health professionals for confidential 1-on-1 support and advice by calling Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 at any time or visit beyondblue.org.au. If someone you care about is experiencing emotional distress, please contact Lifeline who are there to listen and support you, 24 hours a day on 13 11 14. If someone's life is in danger, call 000.

For additional information and detailed references, please refer to the full articles and studies.