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An Enjoyable Distraction During Exercise Augments the Positive Effects of Exercise on Mood

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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis that an enjoyable distraction during exercise will augment the intensity of positive mood post-exercise was tested. A sample of 84 undergraduate students rated their mood and arousal before and after a standardized exercise, which consisted of walking on a treadmill at a pace of 3.6 mph for 10 minutes. During the work out session, participants watched the same television show, which they previously rated as enjoyable, or not enjoyable. As added controls, a third group exercised with no distraction (the TV was turned off); a fourth group did not exercise, but watched the television show. The results showed that exercise alone was sufficient to increase pleasant mood (95% CI 0.61, 1.46) and that including an enjoyable distraction during exercise significantly augmented pleasant mood compared to all other groups (95% CI 1.58, 2.99; $R^2 = 0.29$). These results show that the enjoyment of a distraction is a key factor that can augment the intensity of positive mood following exercise.

Key words: Distraction, exercise, aerobic, mood, enjoyment

Key Points

- The hypothesis that an enjoyable distraction during exercise will augment the intensity of positive mood post-exercise was tested.
- The results support this hypothesis by showing for the first time that while exercise alone was sufficient to increase the intensity of positive mood; combining exercise with an enjoyable distraction resulted in significantly greater increases in pleasant mood compared to exercise alone.
- Accounting for the enjoyment of a distraction type in future studies can increase the sensitivity of research designs used to detect changes in positive mood post-exercise.

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