



Sport and exercise psychology

An exercise route to mental health

Job Centre Plus advisor

James, would you like to come and take a seat, please? I understand from the message I had that you're interested in the Condition Management Programme.

James

Yes.

Advisor

Yeah? Okay. So, the programme at Club Kingswood is the Healthy Lifestyle Programme, and you go there twice a week. You have one session a week where you meet with a personal trainer.

James

Coming to the gym has made me mentally strong. Knowing what I know now, I think everyone should be prescribed gym membership.

Stephen

I was struggling with day-to-day activities. I was almost under my wife's care, really. And now I live my own life.

Tracey

I've got the will to live, that's the thing, and it's given me that back. Motivated me. I want to do something with life. I can't do a lot, but providing I pace myself, I can achieve just as much.

Sue

It changes your mental attitude. It makes you think more positive, you know, and you can do anything. If I can do it, anyone can do it.

Georgina Jupp, CK Academy

The Condition Management Programme came around largely when, I suppose, as a country, really, we realised that we had this massive black hole of people that were on Incapacity Benefit, and that was getting worse. And so there was a move by the Department of Work and Pensions to look at what proactive actions could we take to try and see whether some of those individuals could have a chance to go back into the workplace.

So, our role is around lifestyle programming. It actually involves everything that you would consider to be part of lifestyle. So, it's underpinned by physical activity, both within places like gyms and leisure centres, but also very much about what individuals can do for themselves at home. But it also looks at everything to do with lifestyle. That would include diet, eating healthily, it would include sleep patterns and the importance of those on overall health. It would very much focus on mood, depression and anxiety, and the impact of that upon health, long and short-term. So, it looks at all of those different facets and pulls them together in a six to ten week programme.

Stephen

Previously, I'd been quite an active, sort of, fit guy. I looked after myself. But the depression led me to a place where I was overweight, I wasn't doing any exercise whatsoever, and I was lazy, and I wasn't happy about myself. And, you know, that's the effect of depression.

Tracey

I didn't want to do anything. I couldn't see the point in basically living, if you could it that, because I wasn't. I didn't want to get up out of bed. I had no point, I had no reason. I had no

money. I had no friends in the area, so I didn't know anyone. My parents were quite a way from me, so, basically, what was the point? I had no reason to get up.

I've got a long-term illness, and being out of work for so long, you get into like a depressive state.

And I had regular visits with my job advisor. And this scheme came about, the CMP, and my advisor felt that I would actually benefit from this.

Advisor

You have one session a week where you meet with a personal trainer, and they will devise a fitness programme specifically for you, with your medical condition in mind. Okay?

James

Okay, yeah.

Advisor

So, what I do now is I refer you to see a health assessor.

James

Okay.

Advisor

Who is a medical practitioner, and she'll talk to you about your health, and it's her decision if it's suitable for you to go on the programme, yeah? And then she'll make the arrangements with you for that.

James

Okay.

Advisor

Yeah, okay, so we'll –

Catherine Burns, Essex CMP Director

The initial assessment from the CMP team is it takes place in the job centre, and it's undertaken by one of my healthcare professionals. It's about 40 minutes to an hour. But it's a very important part of the whole experience, for many individuals, it's the first time in many, many years, that they've had that opportunity to sit and review, really, their position.

Sue

I just couldn't understand, I was bewildered. I had no self-confidence anymore. I began to believe I was worthless.

Advisor

So, you went from being a really busy, active working person, to staying indoors and doing nothing.

Sue

I used to sit at home feeling sorry for myself, crying, I was a mess. I had a breakdown, basically. My doctor wouldn't give me any medication because I was, at one point, suicidal.

In actual fact, it was a relief to be able to talk to somebody about it, because although I'd had counselling, that didn't help, because I was just going over the same old thing. Whereas this course was going to be doing something constructive. Well, that's the way I looked at it.

Client

I don't come out a lot, I shut myself away from my family and kids. I don't feel like getting up much. When I do get up, I'm down and miserable, and it's just hard work at the moment.

James

I was diagnosed with tinnitus, severe tinnitus, and had to leave my job that I was in at the time, in the print industry. Once leaving that, I didn't really – that's all I'd known how to do since leaving school. So, I then ended up, I suppose, at the job centre, with this medical condition. I had depression, as well, which was an onset from the tinnitus and not knowing what to do.

Client

All I've ever known is how to be a printer. And I don't really know what to do next.

Catherine Burns

One of the effects – and we're all aware of it – of being out of work, is that a person's confidence, their personal belief in themselves, is diminished quite dramatically, and quite quickly. So, much of what we do, particularly in lifestyle, is around helping people to build up their self-confidence.

Trainer

Stress means different things to different people, and stress can come out in different people in completely different ways. So, what I'd like you do is just to take a look and mark, next to anything on those lists that you identify with.

Tracey

The very first day, I didn't sleep the night before, not at all. I was worried, because I was going to be in a group of people that I'd never met before, and that itself is quite daunting.

Trainer

If you feel a certain way, it's going to cause you to act in a certain way, which is going to cause you to think a certain way, yeah? And then it goes round again. So, if you think in a certain way –

James

It was kind of hard to start off with, it was kind of hard, not knowing what to do. So, to hear other people talking about their problems, as well, it kind of gave everyone the confidence, made us all feel we weren't alone.

Trainer

Did anyone listen to their gut instinct?

Client

Mm. I felt intuitively, I know it's right, but I don't always follow it, because it's considering others and not always myself.

Trainer

Okay.

Client

I say to myself, 'well, that's the way I would prefer it,' but if I did act in that way, then he/she/they would get hurt, I wouldn't like it, or I wouldn't be, in a way, filling out my responsibilities.

Trainer

Right, okay, so sometimes you –

Tracey

They understood that we're all in the same boat, all these new people, group of 10 to 15, and they made every one of us at ease, which was good. I wanted to go back from that moment on.

Trainer

Three, two, one, and off we go.

Trainer

Well done, Mikey, punching. Good going, Gary.

James

By then, being given the tools to then help yourself, i.e. like with fitness and the health side of things, then being shown the gym and the equipment, it gives you that, that there is light at the end of the tunnel, sort of thing.

Tracey

Initially, for the first couple of weeks, you're all on one-to-one with your personal trainer. But you've also got members of the group would actually come in with you, and they've got their own programme to do, you've got your programme to do, but, again, you've got a one-to-one advisor there at all times.

Pushing you, encouraging you, you know. Do what you can, pace yourself, you know, it's not a race, it's not a competition, just do what you're comfortable with doing, and slowly you can build up from there.

Trainer

Good man. Cheryl, very good. We're getting warm now, are we? There you go. Good.

Georgina Jupp

I think those suffering from a mental health condition automatically suffer with motivation, the two go hand-in-hand very often. I think one of the great things about physical activity is that if we can just get people moving, a by-product of that is naturally that you will start to feel better. So, you don't always have to be motivated to make massive change. If we can motivate someone to move around, that can often be the catalyst for much more sustained and ongoing change. So, I think it's massively important that people understand a little bit often will make a big difference.

Sue

When you go to the doctor or you go to counselling, all you're doing is talking about what's happened to you, and you're going over and over the same thing, you're not doing anything about it. Whereas, coming on something like this, you are actually taking control again and doing something about it, you are physically doing something that affects your mental attitude. So, I don't think there's any comparison.

James

Tablets are alright for a quick fix, but it doesn't actually cure the problem. And for myself, when I started on the course, I was on tablets, and didn't like them. I was taking them because I had to, and I was told that they would make me better but didn't want to take them. So, by coming to the gym, it's strange, in a way, but coming to the gym has made me mentally strong. It's given me the strength and the mental fitness to come off the tablets. So, I'm no longer on the tablets. And by still keeping coming to the gym, it just makes me feel better every day.

Tracey

Yeah, it just slowed you down, it slowed you down more than what you really wanted to be, took the thinking, the thought process away from you, you know, everything was an effort, slow, sluggish. And now I'm off the anti-depressants, and I have been for quite a while now, over a year, and, yeah, I don't want to look back, I don't want to go back to that.

Stephen

Comparing it, I'd say it's a different way of tackling it. I was on medication, I still am now. I was having counselling for depression, and with the exercise and that, it was giving me a new sort of lease of life, that extra energy, the extra get up and go. So, it just give me that extra boost that I needed.

Georgina Jupp

Our experience has been that people generally are not happy taking medication. And I think that people are able to come up with some coping strategies that they're able to use long-term.

And whilst we don't say instead of medication, we are very often working together with the medication, I think there will be more and more research around the need to develop programmes such as ours and not always rely on pharmaceutical interventions.

Catherine Burns

Recent guidance to GPs is to discourage prescribing anti-depressants and to consider exercise on prescription. And there's quite a lot of evidence to support the effectiveness in managing anxiety and mild to moderate depression.

Trainer

Maybe now you need to start building activity, physical activity, into your daily lives, yeah? Because exercising regularly can help with stress release. When you're active – and remember, when I say 'exercise,' it doesn't necessarily have to be in the gym, it can just be being active, maybe, I don't know, every weekend, take the kids out playing football.

Georgina Jupp

I think one of the important elements of participating in a lifestyle programme is that you are not steered necessarily towards joining a club. For me, that would be a failure of this programme, if that were the case. What we do is signpost to local activities, of which leisure centres are one. But there are things like green gyms, there are rambling associations, there are free classes put on in local communities, there are college events. There's a whole range of things. What we want to do is to impress upon the person the need to remain physically active. How they do it is up to that individual and what we would want to do is guide and show them some of the different ways they might be able to maintain that.

Ben

Hello James, are you alright?

James

Yeah, not too bad, thanks, Ben. Yourself?

Ben

Yeah, not too bad, not too bad. How's the training going?

James

I never thought I'd be able to do it, but I've then been able to turn something that I enjoy into a career. So, once the CMP course had finished, I still kept on coming to the gym myself, and then looked at doing courses to do, I suppose, emulate like what my tutor had done for me.

I've done my Level 2.

Ben

You doing instructor course.

James

Doing instructor course, yeah, and I'm now moving on – going on to –

Ben

To level 3.

James

Level 3, yeah.

Ben

Good stuff.

James

After seeing how he helped me, it gave me the push to become a trainer, from that, then, take more exams, sit more exams, so then I can then, hopefully, one day be a tutor, and one day I'll be teaching people like myself.

Tracey

It's what in here. You need to get out, you need a different structure of life, you need to see people.

Sue

I just look forward to coming up for a swim, I cycle up here. It's just made me a new person.

James

You can come off the tablets, you can get hold of your life again. And, if anything, you can become a better person than you was before.

Tracey

I now go to the gym, at least once a week, at least, is my target. I now have a hobby, I go out and do these spooky nights, like 'most haunted' nights, you know, I've made a new set of friends, of all ways of life, absolutely brilliant. I'm just looking forward to everything. It's made me want to look forward, you know, there is something out there.