

TREK² HEALTH

RESILIENCE VIA EARTH

TREK2HEALTH'S GROUP ACTIVITY MODULE PROGRAMS ALIGN WITHIN THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION DEFINITION OF MENTAL HEALTH

The main goal of any group activity program is to increase or maintain the amount of physical activity undertaken as part of a healthy lifestyle. Trek2Health is all about improving mental health by reducing sedentary behaviour and increasing both endurance and muscle strength in a natural environment.

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (WHO).

Clearly, there is a need to address a range of mental/personal factors which encourages and improves physical activity.

Too often attempts to partake in physical activities don't last long. In young and middle-aged people, the combination of confidence and ability in the activity will ensure that they don't give up. By participating in a group walking challenge such as Trek2Health's, the enjoyment and purpose it creates is far more likely to be seen as worthwhile and therefore encourage continued participation.

Walking in a natural environment with a group of likeminded participants is both interesting, stimulating and enjoyable. Both the social interaction and the supportive environment will encourage even further physical activity and assist in staying in the moment to reduce chronic stress and achieve goals. An attitude that the activity is worthwhile is critical; walking in a group amongst nature is intrinsically enjoyable and leads to a raising of spirits that can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. It will also maintain a level of physical fitness that reduces the risk of developing chronic disease.

Successful group programs often include an education component to support ongoing behavioural change. Skill acquiring, strategic information sessions and motivational interviewing before and after a group exercise program have been shown to be successful. It is also important to include an exercise leader who encourages a socially cohesive environment in which the participants also learn for themselves. These educational topics include the benefits of physical activity, self-regulation (which includes goal setting), identifying barriers to exercise and coping strategies, and building self-efficacy, stress reduction and exercise designed for fat loss and fitness improvements.

There are many types of group physical activity programs but their ability to be sustainable over time is difficult to confirm. Too often there is ultimately no change to the activity or in the individuals' personal factors. The reasons for this include sample selection, often including those whose physical activity and personal characteristics are already appropriate, or those who drop out of their program. A one size fits all approach is not appropriate in the scenario of group physical activity programs. It is important to take account of individual differences in motives for adopting an active program and, at Trek2Health, we reduce this variability in program outcomes by evaluating clear outcomes from interventions, lifestyle, attitudes, skills/fitness levels and behavioural self-regulation. At Trek2Health we walk the talk, deliver programs that are aligned within the WHO's definition of mental health