

EXERCISE ADDICTION



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Physical activity is good for both mental and physical health – **a scientific fact**

But... Physical activity may be **abused**, quite rarely, but that is **another fact**



Destructive behaviour resulting from exaggerated amounts of physical activities is a **psychological dysfunction** known as **EXERCISE ADDICTION**

EXERCISE ADDICTION

Definitions:

- **“An abnormal reliance on physical activity...”**
(Szabo, 2000 *Physical Activity and Psychological Well-Being*, Chapter 7, pg. 132)
- **Exercise behaviour that results in harm to the exerciser and her or his social environment.**
- **Loss of control over one’s exercise behaviour:**
"It took a toll. It took over my life ... everything revolved around my exercise," (Lisa Tiell, Copyright 2002 by NBC10.com. All rights reserved.)

- Terminology:

Exercise Addiction

Exercise Dependence

Compulsive Exercise Behaviour

Obligatory Exercise

addiction =

dependence + compulsion

Goodman, 1990



‘I just had to do my work-out and get my fix’

Source: **Evening Standard, Tuesday, 1 August 2000**

Brown's (1993) and later Griffiths's (1997) Six components of addiction

Saliency

Euphoria / Satisfaction

Tolerance

Withdrawal Symptoms

Conflict

Relapse



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SHORT REPORT

The exercise addiction inventory: a quick and easy screening tool for health practitioners

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ABSTRACT

Background: Exercise addiction is not routinely screened for probably because available instruments take a long time to administer, their scoring may be complicated, and their interpretation is not always obvious. A new psychometric instrument has been developed that is capable of identifying people affected by, or at risk of, exercise addiction: the exercise addiction inventory (EAI). A preliminary report showed the EAI had good reliability and validity.

Objectives: To test further the EAI's psychometric properties and show that it would be quick and simple to administer by general practitioners.

Methods: A sample of 200 habitual exercisers were given the EAI and two existing exercise addiction scales (obligatory

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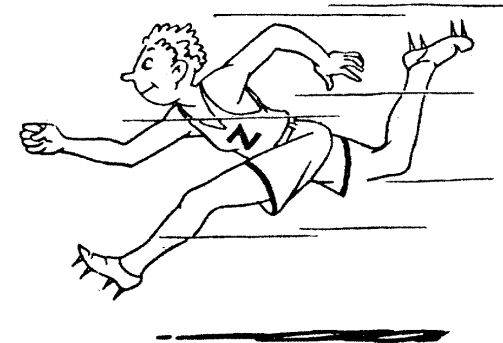
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The screening of exercise addiction

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Exercise is the most important thing in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
Conflicts have arisen between me and my family and/or my partner about the amount of exercise I do.	1	2	3	4	5
I use exercise as a way of changing my mood (e.g. to get a buzz, to escape etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
Over time I have increased the amount of exercise I do in a day.	1	2	3	4	5
If I have to miss an exercise session I feel moody and irritable.	1	2	3	4	5
If I cut down the amount of exercise I do, and then start again, I always end up exercising as often as I did before.	1	2	3	4	5

Possible causes of exercise addiction

- Life stress - Psychological escape
- Eating disorders – Weight loss
- Most likely motivated by negative reinforcement



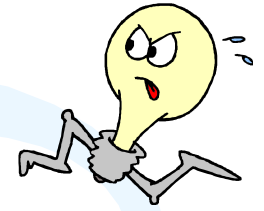
The incidence of exercise addiction

- Very few identified cases
- But they are very severe
- Estimates: 1 to 3% of exercising population



The Sympathetic Arousal Hypothesis

(Thompson and Blanton, 1987)



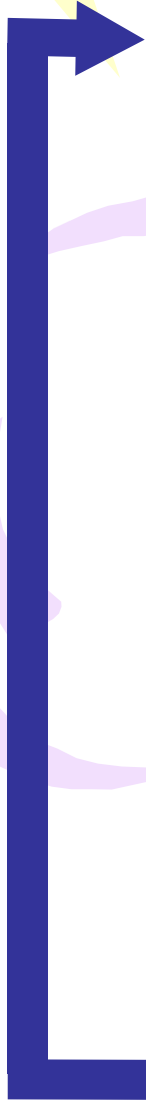
Exercise

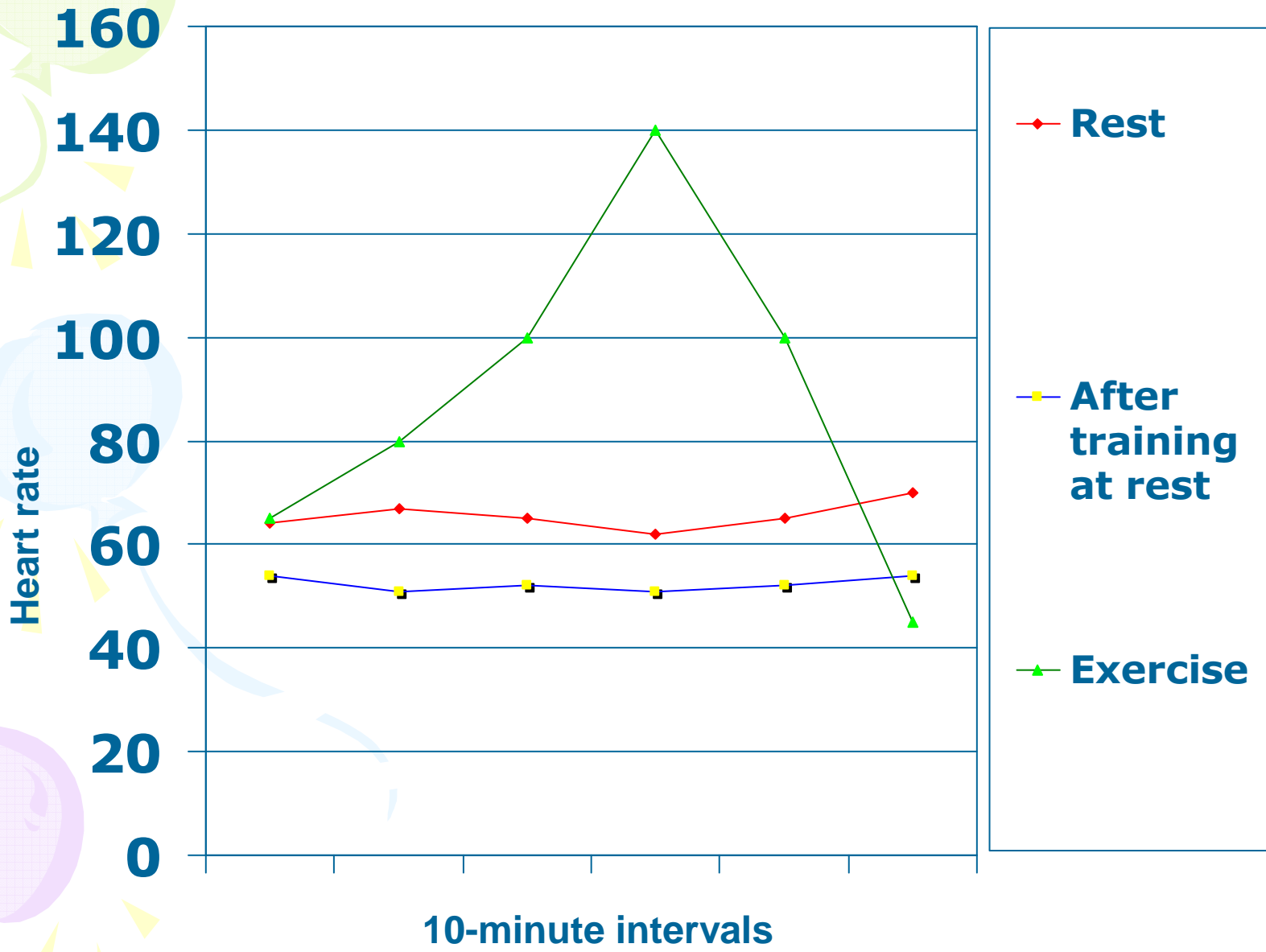
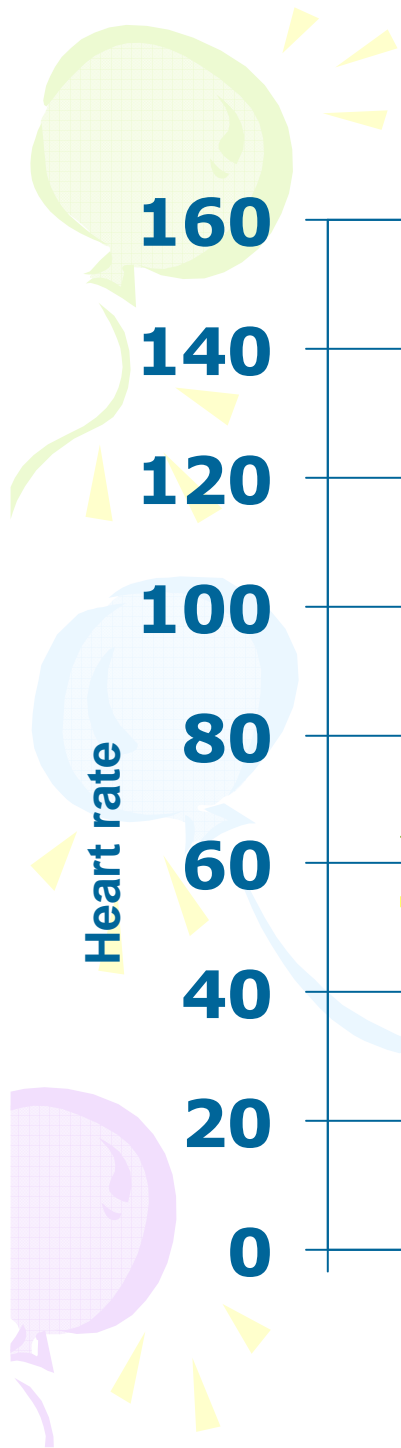
Decreased sympathetic arousal (at rest)

Feelings of fatigue and lethargy at rest

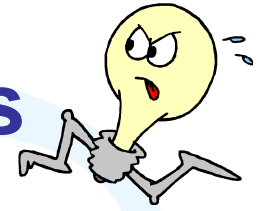
Negative psychological (deprivation) sensations

Need to increase arousal





The Cognitive Appraisal Hypothesis



(A Psychosomatic Model - Szabo, 1995)

Exercise = a method of coping (injury, stress, etc.)



Lack of exercise = lack of coping mechanism



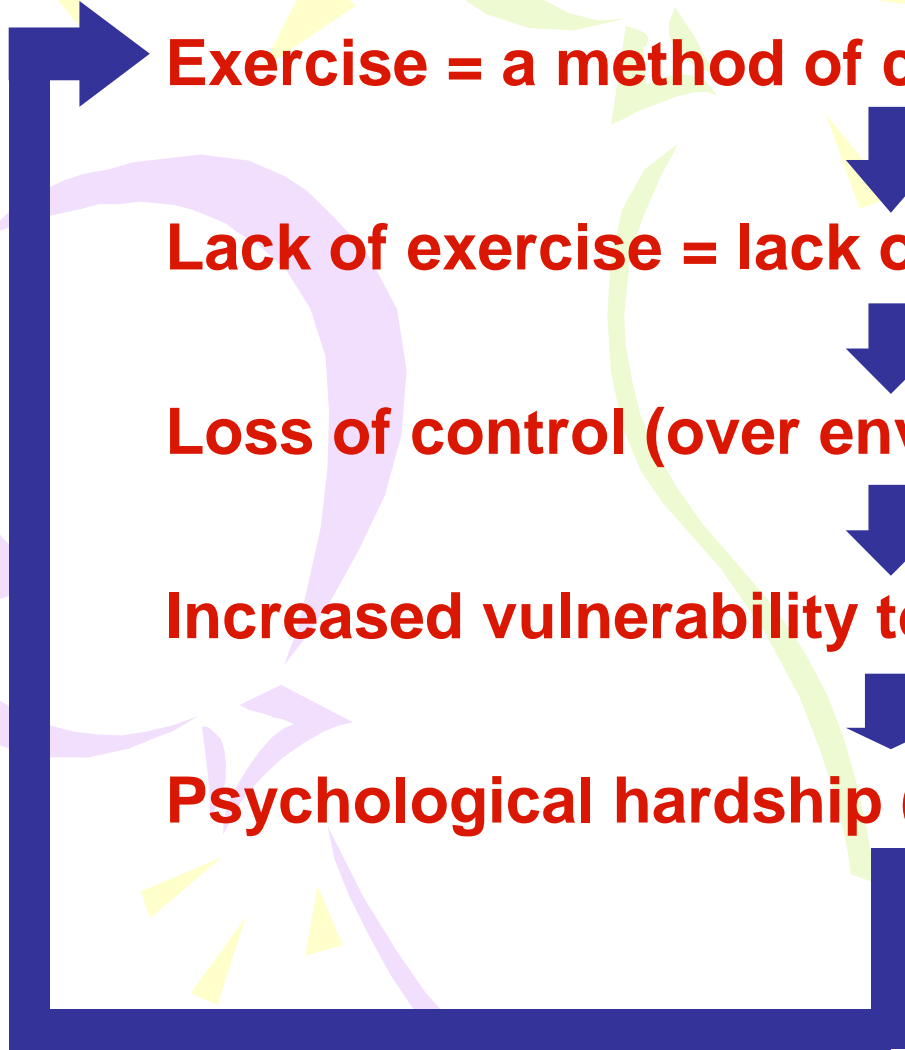
Loss of control (over environment / situation)



Increased vulnerability to stress



Psychological hardship (deprivation feelings)



Other hypotheses

- The endorphin hypothesis
- The distraction hypothesis
- The mastery hypothesis



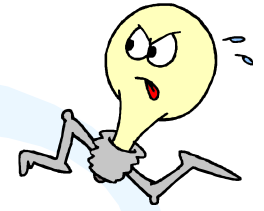
Characteristics of Exercise Addicts

- Introverted
- Unable to express emotions/anger
- High achievers and perfectionists
- Upper-middle socioeconomic class
- Very self-disciplined
- Type A personality

Overview

- Exercise addiction is not the same as commitment to exercise.
- Exercise addiction is best understood in runners since other exercisers have seldom been examined.
- Exercise addiction is very rare (1-3%).
- A significant proportion of people suffering from eating disorders resort to high levels of physical activity to lose weight.
- The mechanism that triggers exercise addiction is difficult to investigate, because only a few case studies are available to scholars.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION



You know guys
I don't exercise
because I don't want to
become an addict...

