

# Hobbies may help defeating depression

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There is increasing interest in referring primary care patients to non-medical sources of support within the community. "Social prescribing" aims at encouraging patients to engage in activities that support the uptake of new hobbies, such as groups or societies that involve making music, drawing, handicrafts such as sewing, carpentry, collecting, or model-making. These activities along with other activities such as volunteering provide social support, all of which are positively associated with mental health. But hobbies specifically also provide engagement, self-expression, creativity, and relaxation.

This study investigated the longitudinal time-varying association between engagement with hobbies and depressive symptoms later in life.

Data came from 8,780 adults aged 50+ from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, with biennial measures from 2004/5 to 2016/17. Participants had a mean age of 67 years. At baseline, 71.9% reported having a hobby or pastime, while 15.6% were above the threshold for depression using the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D).

When controlling for all identified time-varying confounders, taking up a hobby was associated with a decrease in depressive symptoms and 30% lower odds of experiencing depression. Results were consistently found in both men and women, those who were free from depression at baseline, and those who already had depression at baseline. In addition, analyses found that taking up a hobby was associated with the maintenance of lower levels of depressive symptoms and 32% lower odds of developing depression. For those who had depression at baseline and did not have a hobby, taking up a hobby was associated with an improvement in depressive symptoms and 272% higher odds of recovering from that depression.

Overall, the study findings support the use of social prescribing of hobbies as a supplement to patients' existing care plans.

**More information:** Daisy Fancourt et al. Fixed-Effects Analyses of Time-Varying Associations between Hobbies and Depression in a Longitudinal Cohort Study: Support for Social Prescribing?, *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1159/000503571](https://doi.org/10.1159/000503571)

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