



Sam

# Sam's Journey

with Magna Vitae

A Magna Vitae customer experience - written in her own words by Sam.

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Let's talk about exercise, fitness, and mental health: I'm currently writing this curled up on the sofa wracked with – totally unnecessary – feelings of guilt and inadequacy because I haven't managed to go to the gym for three days. For every one of those three days, I got ready to go: peeled myself into my luridly bright 80s-style leggings and baggy T-shirt (of which I have a sizeable collection, the most notable of which being my charmingly oversized – to match my oversized love for him – ode to Ian Beale: I truly believe I may be the most fashionable patron this gym has ever seen!); packed my essentials (water bottle chief among them – never making that mistake again!); and on one occasion actually started making my way there but just...couldn't.

I am so disappointed in myself and so eager to get back on it, but I KNOW I'm not alone in struggling to find motivation not just to go to the gym but for any number of things that we know are beneficial to our health and happiness. I've been wondering why it is so common for us to find it so difficult sometimes to do the things we know help us and it could be for any number of reasons: of course going to the gym is hard work physically which can be a daunting prospect; all those insecurities about our bodies, our appearance, our abilities, our fitness, can be really tough to conquer when working out in a public space; maybe we even feel we don't "deserve" to feel happier and healthier when we're beating ourselves up. Or maybe we simply sometimes just can't be arsed!

Whatever the reason, I want to say to both myself and to YOU dear reader, that it's okay. All we can do is our best and everybody's best is different. Even our OWN best is different day-to-day.

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“ You went to the gym today and absolutely nailed your personal best on the rowing machine? Well done! You are amazing! You stayed in bed all day and binged Game of Thrones for the sixth time? Good for you, I hope it made you feel better. (Unless you got as far as Season 8, in which case, I'm sure it didn't and I'm sorry). You can try again tomorrow. Or the next day. Or the next! Physical fitness and mental wellness is a journey and sometimes we have to take detours or pit stops or even turn back on ourselves. It's all fine. And if you've had a bummer of a day or week like me, I want you to know how proud I am of you and to tell you that we got this!

So with that in mind, how DOES exercise benefit our mental health? I can only speak from experience so here's mine: I have major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and borderline personality disorder. It's like the worst cocktail you've ever tasted concocted by one of Lucifer's lower minions in the seventh circle of Hell. (Not Lucifer himself; I feel like he could make a pretty mean Tequila Sunrise if he put his mind to it). But you don't have to be diagnosed with anything to struggle with, improve, or look after your mental health. Just as we all have bodies, we all have minds, and exercise is – trust me – one of the best ways to look after them. When I'm exercising, it feels like my mind is being gently wiped clean of all the dust and general crap that's accumulated up in there and I just experience this total sense of clarity and calm that I usually find so difficult to come by. Being intently focused on one goal; having to utilise all my energy on pushing my body to its limits; having nothing but the music in my ears and the very physical sensation of my body working hard roots me in the here-and-now, makes my mind and body feel like a team; and pushes anything external, extraneous, and hypothetical to the very back of my mind where I can no longer hear it. In a word, it is freeing. And when I pack up and go home, I feel proud of what I've managed to do; excited to keep pushing myself harder; invigorated, hopeful, positive and tired in the best way: the tired of a job well done; the tired of busy arms and legs; the tired of the end of a good day.

I won't pretend to be an expert on the sciencey side of things (I failed it twice - third time lucky!), but I do know that exercise releases endorphins that make us feel GOOD and HAPPY and MOTIVATED and all that wonderful stuff! And you deserve those endorphins! And, yes we could chase them by demolishing a triple cheeseburger or having a one night stand with Dave from HR (Dave is a totally fictitious person, I hasten to add. I've never even worked anywhere that HAD an HR department so if there are any Daves reading this who work in HR....I'm sorry to get your hopes up), and by all means do those things too if it makes you happy – I'm not here to judge! – but get yourself on that treadmill first! You won't regret it.

Right, I've motivated myself to get back on that scary crosstrainer! How about you? ”