

Banish Your Bad Moods

When you're feeling down, use these techniques to **LIFT** your spirits

*Condensed from **Woman's Day**, Catherine Houck*

MOODS, say the experts, are emotions that tend to become fixed, influencing one's outlook for hours, days or even weeks. That's great if your mood is pleasant, but a problem if you are sad, anxious, angry or simply lethargic.

Perhaps the best way to deal with such moods is to talk them out; sometimes, though, there is no one to listen. Modern pharmacology offers an abundance of tranquilizers, antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs. What many people don't realize, however, is that scientists have discovered the effectiveness of several nondrug approaches to pry you loose from an unwanted mood. These can be just as effective as prescription drugs, and have the added benefit of being nontoxic and nonaddictive.

So next time you feel out of sorts, don't head for the drugstore - try one of these antidotes.

EXERCISE

Of all the mood-altering self-help techniques, aerobic exercise seems to be the most efficient cure for a bad mood.

Researchers have pinpointed biochemical and various other changes that make exercise compare favourably to drugs as a mood raiser. Physical exertion such as housework, however, does little. The key is aerobic exercise; running, cycling, brisk walking, swimming or other repetitive and sustained activities that boost the heart rate, increase circulation and improve the body's utilization of oxygen. Do them for at least 20 minutes a session three to five times a week.

USE COLOUR

"Colour can be a nutrient for the mind just as vitamins are for the body," says New York colour psychologist Patricia Szczerba.

She suggests some ways to lift your spirits:

To help alleviate anxiety and tension, go for neutral colours that have a soothing, calming effect. Soft shades of blue, for example, are often used in hospitals to help calm patients.

to counteract depression, avoid wearing or surrounding yourself with colours that make you feel down - black or dark blue. Opt instead for warm, bright, active colours that lighten your mood.

To defuse irritability and anger, it may help to stay away from red.

TRY MUSIC

When Anne comes home from work, she's usually tense and irritable. Listening to her daughter's frantic rock music one evening, she realized it matched her mood and somehow made her feel better - and more able to relax to Mozart later.

Anne had stumbled on what music therapists call the isomoodic principle, a way to change mood through music. First you match music to your existing mood, then you gradually change the music to reflect the mood you want to attain.

For example, if you're feeling sad, begin by listening to music you consider sad. "Although this may seem to reinforce your sadness, it is the first step in any attempt to change," says New York psychotherapist Carol Merle-Fishman, co-author of The Music Within You. She recommends taping three or four brief selections, gradually heading towards your desired mood.

EAT PROPERLY

Scientists have reported a basic link, common to almost everyone, between food and mood. University of Chicago Medical School psychologist Bonnie Spring says, "Carbohydrates eaten alone are a sort of "comfort food" with a tranquillizing effect." "This is because carbohydrates stimulate the brain's production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for making us feel calm and relaxed" says scientist Judith Wurtman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Forty-three grams of carbohydrates are plenty for a calming effect, and low-calorie ones - popcorn, pretzels - are just as effective as the more fattening - doughnuts, potato chips, cookies.

Eating protein tends to sustain alertness and mental energy. The best proteins are shellfish, fish, chicken, veal and lean beef; 85 to 115 grams are enough to bring about this effect.

High caffeine consumption has also been implicated in mood changes. Psychiatrist John F. Greden at the University of Michigan Medical Centre found, in a controlled study, a strong connection between high caffeine intake and increased depression, irritability and anxiety in some people.

LIGHTEN UP

U.S. National Institute of Mental Health studies have found that many people are susceptible to a type of winter doldrums called **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**. It's caused by light deprivation. A standard fluorescent light is only about one tenth as bright as the light under a tree on a sunny day. When winter depressives add two or three hours of bright, artificial light to their day, their mood lifts.

"Persons suffering from SAD may benefit from

spending more time outdoors during the winter months," says research psychiatrist Norman Rosenthal. Installing a type of artificial light called full-spectrum fluorescent may also help. The key is simply to surround yourself with more light.

DREAM

Sleep can lift a bad mood by relieving exhaustion, but sleeping also allows us to benefit from one of the oldest forms of mental therapy: dreaming. Many researchers now believe that dreams serve an important mood-regulatory function by helping us to assimilate stressful events.

"During sleep, dreams seem to take over the work of constructive problem-solving," says psychologist Rosaline Cartwright, director of the Sleep Disorder Services and Research Centre at Rush Presbyterian St. Luke's Medical Centre in Chicago. "If so, we'll awaken in an improved mood."

THINK POSITIVELY

People are often depressed when their thought patterns are negative and distorted. It is important to recognize and learn to change dejected ways of thinking. Avoid putting yourself down. "All too often," maintains Philadelphia psychologist Judi Eidelson, "negative moods are caused by harsh, unrealistic ways of thinking."

A Northern Illinois University study of college students who had recently experienced anxiety of depression found that those who had tried to find something funny about their predicament felt better in the long run than those who had cried. "Weeping seems to backfire," says psychologist Susan Labott. "People think, Look how I'm crying, I must really be upset."

"The message seems to be, think positive thoughts, and you're actually likely to feel happy," says Deborah Steinberg of New York's Institute for Rational Emotive Therapy. She adds, "Try to take an interest in someone else. Not only will you delight that person, you may lift yourself out of your own self-defeating mood."