**How To Beat A Bad Mood**

**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 a pleasant one, 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, anti-depressants and anti-anxiety drugs. What many people don’t realize, however, is that scientists have discovered the effectiveness of several non-drug approaches to pry you loose from an unwanted mood. These can be just as useful as prescription drugs, and have the added benefit of being nontoxic and non-addictive. 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. “If you could bottle exercise and sell it over the counter, you’d make a fortune,” says Kathryn Lance, author of Running for Health and Beauty.**

**Researchers have pinpointed biochemical and various other changes that make exercise compare favorably to drugs as 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 color: “Color can be a nutrient in the mind just as vitamins are for the body,” says New York color psychologist Patricia Szczerba, who suggests some ways to lift your spirits:**

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

**To counteract depression, avoid wearing or surrounding yourself with colors that make you feel down – black or dark blue, for instance. Go for warm, bright, active colors that lighten your mood.**

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

**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 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 playing three or four brief selections, gradually heading toward your desired mood.**

**Eat right: Scientists have reported a basic link, common to almost everyone, between food and mood. “Carbohydrates eaten alone are a sort of “comfort food” with a tranquilizing effect,” says University of Chicago Medical School psychologist Bonnie Spring. M.I.T. scientist Judith Wurtman further explains, “This is because carbohydrates stimulate the brain’s production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for making us feel calm and relaxed.” One and a half ounces of carbohydrates are plenty for a calming effect, and low-caloric ones – popcorn, pretzels – are just as effective as more fattening ones – doughnuts, potato chips.**

**Eating protein tends to sustain alertness and mental energy. The best proteins are shellfish, fish, chicken, veal and lean beef; three or four ounces can bring about this effect.**

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

**Lighten up: 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, it seems, 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,” says research psychiatrist Norman Rosenthal, “may benefit from spending more time outdoors during the winter months.” Installing a type of artificial light called full-spectrum fluorescent, found in health-food stores and plant shops, also may 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 believe that dreams, remembered or not, serve as an important mood-regulatory function by helping us assimilate stressful events.**

**“During sleep, dreams seem to take over the work of constructive problem-solving,” says psychologist Rosalind Cartwright, director of the Sleep Disorder Services and Research Center at Rush Presbyterian St. Luke’s Medical Center in Chicago. “If the problem isn’t too weighty, we may dispose of it in one night. If so, we’ll awaken in an improved mood.”**

**Think positive: 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 to often,” maintains Philadelphia psychologist Judy Eidelson, “negative moods are caused by harsh, unrealistic ways of thinking.”**

**A Northern Illinois University study of college students who had recently experienced anxiety or 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 more likely to feel happy,” says Deborah Steinberg of New York’s Institute for Rational Emotive Therapist. 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.”**

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***(Catherine Houck, in the January, 1989 issue of Reader's Digest, beginning on page 93)***

**Our moods do not believe in each other. (*Ralph Waldo Emerson)***