



Break free of a bad mood— for good!

Feeling down?
You can wait for the
clouds to lift—or you
can figure out what's
making you crabby
and turn your
day around

One day you're riding high—maybe you got a pat on the back at work or your kid made the hockey team. But the next day? You're pulling out the Kleenex or snapping at the grocery store clerk. Think you're stuck on a roller coaster of ups and downs that are simply an unavoidable part of life? Actually, you can correct the causes of your fluctuating moods and put yourself back on an even track. *By Denise Schipani*

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Take charge of your health

STOP A FUNK BEFORE IT STARTS

Use this guide to home in on the habits that drag you down.

Not sure what's causing your mood swings? Take a look at this list to see if you've fallen prey to one of these feel-good foes—some might surprise you.



MOOD WRECKER

LACK OF SLEEP

Shut-eye helps your body better regulate serotonin, a happiness hormone in the brain. A good night's rest that's cut short or interrupted throws your system out of whack.



MEND IT

Aim for at least seven hours of sleep each night. Avoid stimulating activities such as TV in the hour before bed.



MOOD WRECKER

CAFFEINE

Your a.m. cup of coffee or tea may perk you up, but consuming caffeine from morning till night can lead to lower moods, even into the next day. Caffeine can linger in your system for up to 12 hours, making it difficult for you to get adequate rest.



MEND IT

If you have trouble sleeping, keep caffeine intake to mornings only; otherwise, limit it to before about 2 p.m.



MOOD WRECKER

ALCOHOL As metabolism slows in middle age, your body doesn't process alcohol (a depressant) as well.



MEND IT

Limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one per day.



MOOD WRECKER

STRESS Your body can handle short-term anxiety (a busy workweek), not prolonged anxiety (a divorce). Lingering issues create a constant flood of stress hormones to the brain, which can make you feel exhausted and irritable.



MEND IT

The longer you experience sustained stress, the more likely you are to suffer from depression or an anxiety disorder. See your doctor if a tension-induced low mood sticks around for two weeks or more.



MOOD WRECKER

SUGAR

A sweet treat may give you a boost—thanks to the energy you experience when your blood sugar kicks into high gear—but the feeling

is temporary. Your body overcompensates for the surge with a flood of insulin that causes blood-sugar levels to plunge, sometimes bringing on irritability.



MEND IT

Confine sweets to mealtime. When your body is also processing slower-to-digest foods, such as whole grains or fruits, that are full of fiber, the sugar doesn't hit your bloodstream as rapidly, preventing a spike.



MOOD WRECKER

A LOW-CARB DIET

Depressed about your weight? Forgo low-carb, high-fat diets. They'll likely only send you further into the dumps.



MEND IT

Reduce fat intake and eat complex carbs (like whole grains), which contain serotonin-producing tryptophan.



MOOD WRECKER

VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY

Research suggests that low levels of vitamin D negatively affect mood, a particular problem in the winter months because you get most of your vitamin D from the sun.

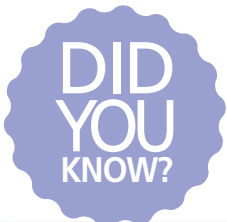


MEND IT

Aim for at least 1,000 units of vitamin D daily. Start with a supplement that contains 400 to 600 units. Food sources of D include fortified milk, salmon, tuna and fortified products, like cereals and breads.



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People in bad moods experienced a memory boost that improved their recollection of an event.

Source: the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

Check your low mood

Use this list to determine if you have a case of the blues or something more serious.

Everyone feels down from time to time, but if these emotions persist or are coupled with excessive worry, you may not be able

to shake them on your own. See your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms for two weeks or longer.

- You feel overwhelmed by simple tasks at work or home.
- You're having trouble sleeping; conversely, you feel the urge to sleep all the time.
- You are so worried about the future that you experience physical symptoms such as jitteriness, shaking, perspiration and muscle tension.
- You lack motivation and are unable to start or finish tasks.
- You're unable to find joy or humor in things that ordinarily bring you pleasure.
- You either lose your normal appetite or eat too much.
- You experience debilitating fatigue and lethargy, even after a good night's rest.


GET AHOLD OF YOUR HORMONES

Your monthly cycle or even your life stage—whether you're mom to a newborn or heading into menopause—can be at the root of your emotional ups and downs.


PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME (PMS)/PREMENSTRUAL DYSPHORIC DISORDER (PMDD):

About 6 percent of women experience PMDD, a severe form of PMS. While research proves that the natural fluctuations of hormones during your cycle may trigger sadness and anxiety, researchers don't fully understand why some women are more susceptible.

THE FIX Keep a daily mood-symptom log. Rate your most troubling symptoms (e.g., anxiety) on a scale of 1 to 10. Note when your period starts. If symptoms are severe and show up in the two weeks before your period occurs, see your doctor.

 POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION (PDD): This form of depression, brought on by normal post-pregnancy hormonal shifts, affects up to 10 percent of women within the first three months after giving birth. As with PMS, it's unknown why some women are more prone. For some, sleep deprivation can trigger PDD or make it worse.

THE FIX Reach out for help with the baby. Enlist your husband, your mother or a friend to assist you with day-to-day care. Have someone else handle at least one nighttime feeding (if you're nursing, pump a bottle of milk before you go to bed) so you can enjoy a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. In severe cases—if you have thoughts about harming your child or yourself—see your doctor right away.

 PERIMENOPAUSE/MENOPAUSE: Experts suspect mood swings during menopause and the time leading up to it may be a result of fluctuating hormone levels. Throw in hot flashes and insomnia, and it's no wonder you may be battling the blues. Don't worry, though—even if you have mood swings with your periods or experience postpartum depression, you are no more likely to feel down during this phase of your life than women without PMS, PMDD or PDD.

THE FIX If symptoms are severe, talk to your doctor about possible treatments. She may recommend hormone therapy, antidepressants, or both. For some women, the combination seems to heighten the effect of the medication.



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Use a mood pick-me-up

Think you have no choice but to sink into every ho-hum slump that comes your way? Not so! Try these tricks.



Watch a comedy
Laughing can raise your levels of endorphins. In fact, just anticipating the hilarity might lift your spirits, according to a 2006 study from Loma Linda University in California.

Indulge in dark chocolate
That's right—enjoy a sweet treat. Make sure you stick to 1 ounce that's at least 70 percent cocoa. Compounds in chocolate stimulate serotonin production.

Take 10
Try setting aside just a small block of time each day to calm your mind. The practice of regular meditation increased activity in the part of the brain associated with positive mood, found a study of Buddhist monks in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Eat fish
Omega-3 fatty acids have been positively linked to better moods and a reduction in bouts of clinical depression. You can get enough of this nutrient from three weekly servings of fatty fish (such as salmon or mackerel), but if you don't like seafood, take a 1,000-milligram supplement of omega-3 DHA.

Adopt a saying
Repeating a feel-good mantra may help you teach your brain to maintain a positive mood. Research shows that specific affirmations work best, such as, "I will smile at people on the train today," rather than the more general, "I am a lovable person."



Keep a bump in the road from slowing you down

Bounce back from everyday mishaps with these healthy habits.

SITUATION	DO...	DON'T...	THE PAYOFF
You have a bad day.	Lace up your sneakers and head out for a walk.	Sit around the house and wallow.	Physical activity lifts mood by increasing endorphins in your brain. The effect can last 12 hours post-workout, according to the American College of Sports Medicine.
You have a fight with your kids.	Call a friend and hash out a solution.	Keep it bottled up.	Supportive friends and family help you cope. Shutting down won't address problems and may lead to health issues, like high blood pressure.
You're laid off from your job.	Spend time with friends and seek their advice. Then set realistic goals and start job searching.	Drown your sorrows in a few glasses of wine or a box of cookies.	When you experience a blow to your ego, it can be tempting to turn to self-destructive behavior. This will only create more problems. Instead, take positive action.
You hear bad (but not life-threatening) health news about a family member.	Do what you can to help, but otherwise go about daily life.	Let it spill over into other areas of your life. (Before you know it, you're snapping at the kids and feel unable to focus on anything else.)	Disheartening news can affect your attitude, which seeps into every area of life. Set aside time to focus on the problem, then carry on with the rest of your day.

Sources: Michael Breus, PhD, author of *Beauty Sleep: Look Younger, Lose Weight, and Feel Great Through Better Sleep*; Katherine Muller, PsyD, director of the Cognitive Behavior Therapy Program at Montefiore Medical Center; Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, PhD, professor of psychology at Yale University and author of *The Power of Women: Harness Your Unique Strengths at Home, at Work, and In Your Community*; David R. Rubinow, MD, director of the Center for Women's Mood Disorders at the University of North Carolina and chair of the UNC Department of Psychiatry; Elizabeth Somer, MA, RD, author of *Eat Your Way to Happiness*