

# Practical Tips to Improve Your Mood

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There are many things you can do to improve how you feel and help you maintain long-term mental/emotional health and happiness. Below are some suggestions ranging from simple self-help tools to life philosophy.



## Sleep

Sleep is a time when we switch off and our brain has the chance to process and integrate the day. Quality sleep profoundly affects how we feel. Difficulty getting to sleep, staying asleep or early waking on a regular basis indicate that something is out of balance. Always aim to reflect on what is causing insomnia and try to resolve the underlying issue.

In the short term, there are some simple techniques for good 'sleep hygiene'.

- Take time to resolve issues and unwind before bed.
- Never have a work station in your bedroom.
- Turn off your phone before going to bed.
- Leave all electronic devices outside of the bedroom.
- Don't work or do other mentally stimulating activities before bed - eg. gaming, scary movies, facebook etc
- If your mind is active, have a warm shower/bath, hot milk, meditate, do yoga, breathing exercises, make love or whatever works for you to calm your mind.
- Avoid caffeine drinks in the evening.
- Avoid eating rich meals late at night.
- Regular exercise helps to release adrenaline from the body.
- Being physically active helps maintain good body rhythms.
- Get up at a reasonable time - even if you haven't slept well. This will help poor sleep cycles get back to normal more quickly.
- Get out in the sun during the day. This also helps good wake/sleep cycles.
- Try to avoid long daytime naps.
- Look at the stars, breathe in the night air; be present and take time to be grateful for all the good things that happened today.

If you have had a busy week, allow yourself to sleep in or take an afternoon siesta to catch up. You will be amazed at how luxurious this feels. If you have young children, take turns with your partner each weekend so that you both get the chance to sleep in, knowing that you will not be interrupted.

If your sleep issues don't resolve quickly, seek help. Look for a medicine, therapy or activity that will help you connect with the underlying cause of what is wrong.

## Diet

Eating nutritious, natural food will give your body what it needs to make energy and maintain vitality, strength and resilience. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies profoundly affect our energy and mood. Choose a diet rich in whole foods – organic or bio-dynamic if possible, with fresh fruit and vegetables, chemical free meat, whole grains, nuts, seeds, pulses and good oils. Minimise your intake of sugar, alcohol and junk food and drink lots of water. Take control of your unhealthy cravings that don't sustain good health. This will make you feel empowered.



Take the time to source quality food and prepare nourishing meals from fresh produce. This is deeply satisfying and helps you to feel connected with the earth.

## Exercise

Regular vigorous exercise releases endorphins, which are hormones that make you feel better. Sometimes when you feel down, motivating yourself to move can be challenging. Try to push past this barrier in the knowledge that you will feel better on the other side of the exercise. Choose an activity you enjoy – walking, swimming, dancing, tennis. Start with small goals and build on these. If the goals are too high, you can feel overwhelmed and not even begin. This further leads to a sense of failure and feeling worse about yourself. Find an exercise 'buddy' to help motivate each other. Join a group or club. Whatever works for you, find a way to incorporate exercise into every day.

## Sunlight and Fresh Air

Daily exposure to sunlight provides you with Vitamin D. Vitamin D can only be taken into the body via sunlight (and limited foods). There is increasing evidence that low Vitamin D may be one of many factors contributing to low mood. Natural light also helps our bodies to maintain their natural rhythms and sleep cycles.

Try to get outside for at least 20 minutes every day. Breathe deeply the fresh air to replenish your oxygen and increase your vitality.

## Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises consciously change the rate, depth and pattern of breathing. This sends a message from the respiratory system to the brain and the brain responds by a settling of the nervous system.

If you are experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety, explore breathing exercises. There are many you can find on the internet, including the yoga practice of alternate nostril breathing. Practice at home until you have mastered the technique, then you will be able to apply at times of high stress in any situation – whilst driving, before a presentation, when the kids are driving you nuts.

## Rhythm of Life

Simple as this may sound, one of the best things you can do for low mood is to maintain a healthy rhythm of life. Force yourself to get up at a reasonable hour, shower, put on clean clothes, eat regular meals, go to work, catch up with friends. Sometimes you just have to ‘fake it till you make it.’

## Activity

Write a list of all the things that make you feel good and give each a star rating for how much pleasure they give you. Think of it like a bank of joy. Somedays you might need to take out 5 stars of ‘feel good’ and other times just 2. Then select an activity from your feel good list corresponding with how many stars you need for that day.

Try to incorporate activities that make you feel good into every day.



## Avoid Quick Fixes

Try to refrain from taking drugs or alcohol. Whilst substances can temporarily make you feel better, they don't deal with the underlying problem and often cause a secondary negative effect when they wear off. This can be as simple as needing coffee every day to feel awake to drinking excessively at the end of the day to wind down. Many substances are habit forming and don't support you in the long term.

## Work-Life Balance

Work can provide an enormous sense of satisfaction, achievement and purpose, which are important for emotional health. However we can become consumed by it to the neglect of other important parts of our lives. Try to compartmentalise your work. Work to your best ability but don't take it home with you. Turn off your phone, computer and i-pad at the end of the day and be truly available for yourself, your family and another whole world outside of work. It is this that recharges and nourishes you. You might work to support your family, but without taking time to appreciate each other and recharge, relationships break down and they no longer support you.

It is difficult to maintain the pace and interest in work in the long term if you don't have this balance. Take breaks when you need them and have soulful holidays.

## Be Still

Are you able to sit still and empty your mind and just 'be', totally in the moment, at peace with yourself and your world? We have grown so accustomed to high levels of stimulation and instant gratification that stillness is hard to attain. Find a way to allow yourself time to relax every day. This might be through walking, being in nature, relaxation or meditation exercises. Let go of obsessions, preoccupations, catastrophising and self-concern – even if just for a few moments. Once your mind is quiet, there is space for clarity and perspective and your troubles may seem less important.

“Peace can be elusive, but it is really with us all the time. We just cover it over with other feelings. If you want to be peaceful, let go of what you are holding onto and be at peace with whatever is happening in the present moment. Be still, close your eyes, take a deep breath, then another. Be at peace with others. Have no expectations...



Peace is found right now, in the present. Not later, not after you have done something else or after things get better. Right now. Take a moment now clear your mind, forget about the past or the future, your hurts, sorrows and troubles, your joys, aspirations and achievements. Just let go. Just breathe. Just be. That is where you will find the peace you seek, this moment and every moment, without effort, within you all the time.” J Reichenberg-Ullmann (2012:73) *The Homœopathic Treatment of Depression and Anxiety*.

## Nature

There is nothing quite like immersing yourself in nature to make you feel better. Put your hands in the earth, grow some food, walk bare foot on the beach; put your feet in the ocean; stand outside in the rain; walk in the mountains; swim in the ocean; look at your garden; watch children at play; look at the sunset; listen to the birds sing. Take the time to enjoy the richness of nature. It is incredibly grounding and puts life into perspective. Don't just look, listen and touch. See it, hear it, feel it and truly experience this wonderful world we live in!

## Listen to your Inner Voice

It is no good looking for external things to make us happy. If we are not satisfied with our life, looking outside is just a distraction. Take the time to reflect and listen to your inner voice. What do you need to do to be happy, content, fulfilled? Follow the path that resonates for you and have the courage to make choices around this. Life is short. We each have a purpose. Following our path can bring immense satisfaction and fulfillment.

Having a purpose and feeling fulfilled are core ingredients for emotional health.

## Laugh Out Loud

It is easy to get caught up dwelling on the negatives. Alternatively, try to see the funny side of situations. Learn to laugh at yourself and find the ridiculous and absurd in situations. Watch funny movies, tell jokes, play with children and animals. There are even yoga practices that involve belly laughing. Laughter has an uncanny way of releasing tension and improving mood.

Mentally acknowledge and appreciate your qualities and the good things in your life – your friends and family; that you have safe and secure housing; clean air and water; good health; mobility; resilience; courage; life.

## Nurture Relationships

Giving and receiving love is a core part of making us feel worthwhile and valued. Be kind and generous to others in whatever way is appropriate, being mindful to not let yourself become depleted. Equally, ask for help when you need it – especially when feeling down or upset. Love and support can make an enormous difference during the hard times in life. If you don't have friends or family, then reach out to your community. Mutually being there to support each other during crises deepens the friendships in our lives and they become more meaningful.

Be honest in relationships and with yourself. This builds trust and friendship. Face your problems, be realistic and find solutions.

Surround yourself with positive people who believe in you and support you to fulfill your highest potential. Have the courage to let go of friendships that bring you down. Sometimes you have to create the space for more positive things to move in.

Acknowledge past hurts. Make amends with those you have hurt and who have hurt you. True forgiveness of yourself and others can release a lot of suffering. Sometimes it is necessary to heal past hurts to be able to move forward. It can be hard to let go, but hanging on to past resentments, bitterness and negativity can make us unwell.

## Final Comment

Changes in mood can occur for a variety of reasons - life events, hormones, poor lifestyle, toxicity, poor diet and many more. Try to understand why you are feeling like that and always seek help if your mood is so altered that you are not able to recover or you no longer feel safe.

There are a range of traditional, psychological and natural therapies that can support people who are suffering with mood changes. It is worth exploring and finding health care options that suit you.

## Inspiration

