In This Issue

Page 1 - Shake it Off - Boosting Your Mood

Page 2 - Signs and Symptoms of a Mood Disorder

Page 3 - 14 Instant Ways to Calm Yourself Down

Page 5 - SCA Scholarship Recipients and Application

Page 8 - Benefits Spotlight
   Tickets at Work, MDLive, and more!

Page 11 - 10 Healthy Foods to Boost Your Mood

Shake it Off - Boosting Your Mood

Have you ever had a bad mood you just couldn’t shake? Everyone feels grouchy or irritable some days. But a bad mood or major mood swings that go on too long may signal a bigger problem. The good news is that certain healthy habits can help you boost your mood.

“Some people are more moody than other people. Normal mood actually varies from person to person,” explains Dr. Carlos Zarate, chief of NIH’s mood disorders group.

That’s because we all have different “temperaments,” or combinations of personality traits that are biologically based. These are fairly stable over time.

“Considerable research shows that people really differ in their basic temperament,” says Dr. Maria Kovacs, an NIH-funded psychologist at the University of Pittsburgh.

“There are some people who temperamentally are always in a ‘good’ mood. And there are people who are temperamentally always in a ‘bad’ mood.”

For example, Zarate says, some people don’t seem to be fazed no matter what happens. Others worry about minor things and tend to overblow them.
People who have a more negative temperament tend to have a higher risk for mood and anxiety disorders.

**Signs and Symptoms of a Mood Disorder**

- Continuously feeling sad, anxious, “empty,” or irritable.
- Feeling guilty, worthless, helpless, or hopeless.
- Losing interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities.
- Low energy or fatigue.
- Moving or talking more slowly.
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping.
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts.
- Difficulty controlling worries.
- Aches or pains, headaches, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause.

**Changing Moods**

It’s not only temperament that affects how you feel each day. Daily habits that affect your ability to manage stress—like diet, exercise, sleep, or how much alcohol you drink—play an important role, too.

“If you address those factors—have good diet, good exercise, good sleep-wake habits, regular activities, routines, and try to disconnect from work and other stressors—those do have beneficial effects on mood and keeping you healthy,” Zarate says.

Other biological factors can affect your mood too, like hormones. Women may experience shifts in hormones during their menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause that cause mood changes. Men can have decreases in testosterone as they age, which has been linked to depression.

Certain medical conditions, such as a vitamin deficiency, can make you feel “down” or lack energy. Mental health conditions like depression and bipolar disorder can also cause you to feel very sad and have low energy.

Other mental health conditions can cause mood issues as well—for example, anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, and personality disorders.

It’s okay once in a while for people not to have a good mood, Zarate explains. “Moods that fluctuate occasionally are a normal thing. It’s when it’s combined with other symptoms—like significant distress and/or impairment of function or relationships—that it becomes an issue.”

People may not know when their mood has become a problem. “Friends and family members should be open and honest with each other and let them know what they’re seeing,” he says, “because it can lead to strain on family relationships, other relationships, or work issues.”

**Bouncing Back**

“Mood is a normal part of life, and having emotions is a normal part of life,” Kovacs says. “Sometimes you feel more negative than other times. That’s not necessarily bad.”

Kovacs studies the strategies people use to repair their mood when feeling down. Her team and others have shown that what you do when feeling down can boost your mood or spiral you into feeling worse.

“One of the most common strategies that both children and adults use is what I call ‘attention refocusing,’” she explains. “Meaning that they stop paying attention to whatever is making them miserable or unhappy and they start putting their attention elsewhere.”

For kids, this may mean finding a specific task to do when they’re upset, like helping a parent with chores or finding someone to play with. For adults, it may mean having a conversation with a friend or going for a walk or to see a movie.

Kovacs has found that people with depression or other mental health conditions tend to turn to coping strategies that worsen their mood rather than lift it. For example, thinking about what’s bothering them over and over again or avoiding or hiding their feelings. These strategies can make negative feelings stronger or last longer.

Her research has shown that people often use the same strategies that their parents or older siblings use. It can be hard to change the strategies to manage emotions because people are not always aware of them. For those with mood problems, talking with a mental health professional can help to identify negative patterns and choose healthier coping skills.

“If you come from a family that has a history of depression, it’s incredibly important to try to create an environment for yourself that can maximize the likelihood that you’re not going to get into a depression,” Kovacs says. That means avoiding things that can trigger depression or anxiety, like not getting enough sleep or exercise.

**Keeping Track**

Charting your moods can help you figure out what’s affecting how you feel. There are even apps that help.

Dr. David C. Mohr, who studies technology-based mental health interventions at Northwestern University, has found that people want to do more than just track their moods using apps. They want to see how
their activities and moods are related, to help them take action to feel better.

“That sounds like a simple task, but it’s difficult to do in a way—and provide information back in a way—that’s understandable and reliable,” Mohr explains. “That’s one of the directions we’re working on right now.”

Mohr’s team is developing ways to teach coping skills and deliver mental health services remotely. They’ve designed a set of apps called IntelliCare that give strategies for improving mental health. They also created a “hub” app, IntelliCare Hub, that recommends which of the apps to try based on how you’re feeling.

The team tested whether using the hub app could improve symptoms of depression and anxiety in over 90 people. The participants used the app for eight weeks and had a coach who texted them a few times a week to check in.

“What we see is that we get significant drops in depression and anxiety, similar to what you’d see in psychotherapy or medications,” Mohr says. But more studies are needed to understand the effects of mental health apps like these.

If your mood is making it hard to cope with daily life, talk with your health care provider. If you’re having suicidal thoughts, call your doctor immediately or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

Article reprinted from https://newsinhealth.nih.gov

14 Instant Ways to Calm Yourself Down

Becoming easily overwhelmed or over-aroused is common in highly sensitive people. Here are some tips and tricks I’ve learned to take the edge off.

As a highly sensitive person (as defined by Elaine Aron in her bestseller The Highly Sensitive Person), I’m easily overwhelmed or over-aroused. As such, I am always looking for ways to calm down. Here are some techniques I have compiled over the years. Some of them I picked up in Aron’s book, some as part of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program I participated in, and others in Lauren Brukner’s fantastic book The Kids’ Guide to Staying Awesome and in Control (but they work for adults, too).

1. Get to the Pressure Point With Hand Massage

I learned this one in both the MBSR program and in Brukner’s book. What’s great about it is that you can do it while attending a lecture, listening to your kids fight, or sitting at your desk working. No one will notice. Simply use the thumb of one hand and press around the palm of the other hand. It’s very soothing.

2. Relieve Stress and Ground Yourself With a Palm Push

By pushing your palms together and holding for 5 to 10 seconds, you give your body “proprioceptive input,” according to Brukner, which “lets your body know where it is in space.” I like this one because it reminds me of tree position in yoga, which is the last of the standing series postures in Bikram yoga. The palm push is like a mini, portable tree position I can pull out anytime to calm down.

3. Combat Stressful Situations by Closing Your Eyes

Aron says that 80 percent of sensory stimulation comes in through the eyes, so shutting them every now and then gives your brain a much-needed break. She also says that she has found that highly sensitive persons do better if they can stay...
in bed with their eyes closed for nine hours. We don't have to be sleeping. Just lying in bed with our eyes closed allows for some chill time that we need before being bombarded with stimulation.

4. Sigh to Help Yourself Be Fully Present in the Moment
During the MBSR class, we would take a few mindful sighs between transitioning from one person speaking to another. You breathe in to a count of five through your mouth, and then you let out a very loud sigh, the sound you hear your teenage make. I was always amazed at how powerful those small sighs were to adjust my energy level and focus.

5. Do This Monkey Stretch to Release Tension
In this exercise, you bring your hands (arms extended) in front of you, then bring the arms down. Then you bring your arms (still extended) to your side, and then down. Finally you bring your arms all the way past your head and then swoop down, with your head dangling between your knees, and you hang out there for a second. This exercise is extremely effective at releasing the tension we hold in different parts of our body.

6. Give Yourself a 10-Second Hug to Boost Your Mood
Did you know that a 10-second hug a day can change biochemical and physiological forces in your body that can lower the risk of heart disease, combat stress, fight fatigue, boost your immune system, and ease depression? You can begin by giving yourself a hug. By squeezing your belly and back at the same time, you are again giving yourself proprioceptive input (letting your body know where you are in space), says Brukner, which can help stabilize you.

7. Stabilize Yourself With a Five-Second Wall Push
The wall push is especially beneficial for people with sensory integration issues. You simply push against the wall with flat palms and feet planted on the floor for 5 to 10 seconds. If you’ve ever experienced an earthquake, you can appreciate why this gesture is calming — placing the weight of our body against a solid, immobile surface and feeling the pull of gravity is stabilizing, even on a subconscious level.

8. Gain Power and Calm With a Superman Pose
If you do Bikram yoga, the Superman pose is basically the full Locust position (airplane position), except the arms and the hands are stretched out in front of you, not to the sides. You lie on your belly on the floor and extend your arms in front of you. At the same time, you extend your legs behind you and hold them straight out. Hold that pose for 10 seconds. It’s a great exercise if you are groggy, overexcited, distracted, or antsy.

9. Shake It Off and You’ll Free Yourself From Fear
Did you know that animals relieve their stress by shaking? Lots of animals like antelopes shake off their fear after being frozen in panic to escape a predator. In the MBSR program, we practiced shaking for about 15 minutes at a time. I can’t say it looked all that pretty, but neurologically, I do believe it was beneficial.

10. Inhale Deeply for a Relaxing Bubble Breath
My favorite exercise in Brukner’s book is the Bubble Breath, because it is so simple and calming. Here’s how to do it:

- Breathe in for five seconds, out for five seconds.
- Imagine you have a wand with a bubble on it. When you breathe out, be careful not to pop the bubble.
- Place one flat palm on your heart, one flat palm on your belly.
- Breathe in through your nose and hold your breath for five seconds.
- Breathe out a large “bubble” through pursed lips, blow out for five seconds.

11. Pour a Few Drops of Lavender Essential Oil
There are different theories as how and why lavender oil calms you down. Some scientists believe that lavender stimulates the activity of brain cells in the amygdala (fear center) similar to the way some sedatives work. Others think molecules from essential oils interact in the blood with enzymes and hormones. Research backs its soothing results. A study published in the American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine measured the responses of 17 cancer hospice patients to humidified essential lavender oil aromatherapy. Results reflected a positive change in blood pressure and pulse, pain, anxiety, depression, and sense of well-being. I sometimes use lavender oil to sleep better.

12. Hydrate With Water and Meditate on Water
During the workday, I will often walk a block over to a creek and follow the subtle current with my eyes. Maybe it is because as infants we emerged from water that it has the power to soothe. “Water helps in many ways,” writes Aron. “When over-roused, keep drinking it — a big glass of it once an hour. Walk beside some water, look at it, listen to it. Get into some if you can, for a bath or a swim. Hot tubs and hot springs are popular for good reasons.”

13. Music Therapy Heals the Body, Mind, and Soul
From the earliest days of civilization, music has been used to heal the body and soul, and to express what is difficult to articulate in words. Victor Hugo once said, “Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.” Therapists have tapped into the healing power of creative lyrics and the composition of notes to design music therapy programs for persons struggling with depression.

14. Reduce Anxiety With the Four-Square Breathing Exercise
A final breathing exercise to try is the “Four Square,” which I learned years ago to reduce anxiety:

- Breathe in slowly to a count of four.
- Hold the breath for a count of four.
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips to a count of four.
- Rest for a count of four (without taking any breaths).
- Take two normal breaths.
- Start over again with number one.

Article reprinted from www.everydayhealth.com
By Therese Borchard
SCA Scholarship Recipients

The Board of Directors is proud to recognize the 2018-2019 scholarship recipients. Each student received a scholarship in the amount of $2,500 from Southern Consumers Alliance.

Thomas John Vogel - University of Tampa
Gabriella Barber - University of South Carolina-Columbia
Nicholas Cohn - Florida State University
Emily Amon - University of Florida
Taryn Santiago - Florida Atlantic University
Philip Santiago - Florida Atlantic University
William Lombard Bingo - Colgate University
Southern Consumers Alliance (SCA) awards scholarships of $2,500 each to students who are pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees in business-related fields and who meet the criteria listed below. Awards are based on grade point average and extracurricular activities. All requested information must be received by the Scholarship Committee before your application will be considered. Be sure to complete both sides of the application before submission, and please print clearly.

Application deadline: July 31

Criteria for SCA Scholarship
1. You must be either: a) SCA Member whose membership is current and has been in good standing for the past 6 consecutive months; or b) spouse or child (28 years or younger) of an SCA Member whose membership is current and has been in good standing for the past 6 consecutive months.

2. You must have a 3.0 or higher cumulative Grade Point Average at your current educational facility (high school or college) and you must be pursuing study in a business-related field. You must be able to show your GPA to the SCA Scholarship Committee by e-mailing, faxing or mailing current educational facility-generated documents.

Applicant Information (All information will remain strictly confidential.)
Student’s Full Name: __________________________  Student’s Social Security #: ______________________

Student’s Permanent Address: __________________________
City: __________________________  State: _________  Zip: __________________________

Phone Number: ( ) _______________  E-Mail Address: __________________________

I understand that recipients of SCA Scholar Funds may be advised to declare these proceeds based upon applicable State and Federal income tax rulings.
Applicant Signature: ________________________________________________

Educational Institution Information
Name of School you are, or will be, attending: __________________________

☐ Full-time  ☐ Part-time  Number of hours: __________
(Undergraduate full-time is 12 hours or more; part-time is 6-9 hours or more.)

Area of Concentration/Major: __________________________

Cumulative GPA: _______  Previous Semester GPA: _______  Current Year or # Hours Completed: _______

Please list any additional scholarships and/or grants you have been awarded:

(continue to other side)
Required Additional Information

Scholarship Applications will not be considered without the additional information listed below. It can be e-mailed, faxed or mailed as attachments along with your application. If sent separately, be sure to identify each item with your name and phone number. The following are separate checklists for first-time applicants and students re-applying for the scholarship.

(Please check off each item as you complete it.)

FIRST-TIME APPLICANT Checklist:
- A brief essay about why you feel you deserve an SCA Scholarship. Include your educational goals.
- Two letters of recommendation. One letter should be from a teacher or administrator.
- Your high school and/or college transcript. Please send grades from the semester prior to the semester for which you are applying.
- A list of all your extracurricular activities and clubs.
- Any other information you feel is pertinent to your being considered for this scholarship.

CURRENT RECIPIENT Checklist (re-applying for scholarship):
- Previous semester’s grades.
- A statement on your progress and any changes you might have made in your educational goals.

Where committee will send scholarship money, if awarded

Name of school you are, or will be, attending: ________________________________

Name of financial aid contact person: ________________________________

Financial aid contact address: ________________________________

City: ________________________________ State: _______ Zip: ________________

Financial aid contact phone number: (__________) ________________________________

APPLICATION DEADLINE: July 31

E-mail, fax, or mail your application and all supporting documents to:

E-Mail: scholar@southernconsumers.org
Fax: 636-530-7777 (Attn: Southern Consumers Alliance Scholarship Committee)
Mail: Southern Consumers Alliance Scholarship Committee
16476 Wild Horse Creek Road, Chesterfield, MO 63017

Note: Recipients of SCA Scholarship Program funds may be advised to declare these proceeds based on applicable state and federal income tax rulings.
We appreciate our members!

The Board of Directors would like to show their appreciation by offering this exciting new benefit to all members of Southern Consumers Alliance!

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10 Healthy Foods to Boost Your Mood
Foods That May Help You Manage Depression

Think a glazed doughnut or a greasy burger will help you feel better? Think again. The science on food and mood suggests a feel-better treat should look different.

Not only does a healthy diet help control your waistline, but smarter food choices may also help ward off symptoms of depression. The best nutritional plan to prevent depression is likely to be a varied diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, beans, and foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids. While you increase these healthy foods, cut down on the processed and prepackaged foods you eat, according to dietary recommendations for depression published in August 2015 in the journal Nutritional Neuroscience.

“Eating several servings of fruits and veggies daily, along with whole grains, lean meats, and occasional treats is the best way to support good mental and physical health throughout life,” says Felice Jacka, PhD, president of the International Society for Nutritional Psychiatry Research (ISNPR) and the Australian Alliance for the Prevention of Mental Disorders. Dr. Jacka’s research into the relationship between diet and depression has pointed to the importance of healthy foods and a varied diet to boost mood. “The way that food interacts in our bodies to support or reduce health is highly complex,” she says. “This is why reducing the focus to single nutrients or food components is of limited value.”

Along with a prescribed treatment plan, certain foods may help manage depression by providing a variety of important nutrients. Start by putting these 10 foods on your menu.

- **Nuts** - Jacka recommends consuming fresh nuts on a daily basis. Nuts are healthy foods densely packed with fiber, protein, and healthy fats — just keep track of calories, which can add up quickly. Try to get about 1 ounce a day of mixed nuts, including walnuts and almonds. Munch on nuts containing omega-3 fatty acids, such as walnuts and almonds, for the greatest long-term benefits.

- **Grass-Fed Beef** - High-quality proteins are building blocks for a mood-boosting diet, Jacka says. She highlights grass-fed beef as an example of a healthy protein to include for balancing depression and diet. According to Jacka’s research team, grass-fed beef contains more of the healthy fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids, that might play a role in managing depression.

- **Fish** - Fish is one healthy food that can help fight depression, according to research published in January 2014 in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Fish plays a role in many traditional regional diets, such as the Mediterranean, Norwegian, and Japanese diets, that have been studied and recommended for their anti-depressive benefits. Try eating a 3-ounce serving of fish two or three times a week, Jacka says.

- **Whole Grains** - Choosing whole grains and high-fiber foods over refined sugar and flour products is good for your body and brain health. “Keeping your blood sugar stable by not eating too many sweets or highly refined carbohydrates is a good place to start,” says Marjorie Nolan Cohn, RD, CDN, a dietitian in New York City. “Blood sugar-stabilizing foods can affect mood by helping to regulate brain neurotransmitter secretions.” Women should get 25 grams of fiber daily, while men need 38 grams, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

- **Fruit** - The more fruit you eat, the lower your risk of depression, according to a review of research examining the correlation between fruit and vegetable consumption and depression. The results of the data analysis appeared in September 2015 in the journal Nutrition. Fruit is rich in vitamins, minerals, and micronutrients, making it a great food to indulge in when you want a sweet sensation. Eating a variety of fruits, including berries, is ideal, Jacka says. Aim for 1½ to 2 cups of fruit daily, recommends the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Start with a banana — a healthy sweet treat that’s been linked to improving mood.

- **Vegetables** - “Eat a wide array of vegetables, with lots of leafy greens and high-fiber root vegetables,” Jacka says. The same research analysis that linked higher fruit intake with reduced depression risk suggested that eating more vegetables correlates with the same outcome. When you’re feeling blue, a carrot might be the last thing on your mind, but the variety of vitamins and minerals in vegetables, as well as their fiber content, may help protect you against low mood and depression. You’ll want 2 to 3 cups of vegetables daily, the USDA says.

- **Fermented Foods** - “The new and rapidly emerging field of research into gut health suggests that diet is essential in maintaining healthy intestinal microbiota, which appears to influence behavior as well as health,” Jacka says. Fermented foods like kimchi, sauerkraut, tempeh, kombucha, and certain yogurts are good sources of healthy bacteria called probiotics.

- **Beans and Peas** - The Mediterranean-style diet has many advantages, including a potential role in preventing and managing depression over your life span, according to a study published in February 2013 in The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging. Legumes, including lentils, beans, peas, and chickpeas are a large component of the Mediterranean diet. What’s more, legumes and other high-fiber foods (including oatmeal, asparagus, and bananas) support gut health by providing prebiotics, which feed...
the healthy bacteria in your gut. Depending on your age and gender, you should be eating 1 to 2 cups of beans per week, according to the USDA. Reach for some warming lentil soup or scoop up hummus with raw veggies at your next meal.

• **Hot Cocoa** - Research published in May 2013 in the Journal of Psychopharmacology looked at the mood and cognitive benefits of having a chocolate drink every day for a month. Chocolate contains a type of antioxidant called polyphenols, which are thought to boost mood. The 72 female participants were divided into three groups, drinking cocoa with 0 mg, 250 mg, or 500 mg of polyphenols. Those who drank the chocolate with the highest polyphenol count experienced the greatest boost in mood, feeling calmer and more content.

• **Coffee** - A cup of caffeinated coffee could boost your mood, both short and long term. On a short-term basis, the caffeine provides an immediate pick-me-up — and can provide a social mood boost if you’re at a coffee bar. Plus, a review of data from 12 studies of caffeine and depression suggests that coffee may help protect against depression. According to the results, reported in January 2016 in the journal Molecular Nutrition & Food Research, you’ll get the most protection with about 2 cups (400 milliliters) of coffee per day.

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*Article reprinted from www.everydayhealth.com*

*By Madeline R Vann, MPH*

*Medically Reviewed by Farrokh Sohrabi, MD*