

NIH News in Health

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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.

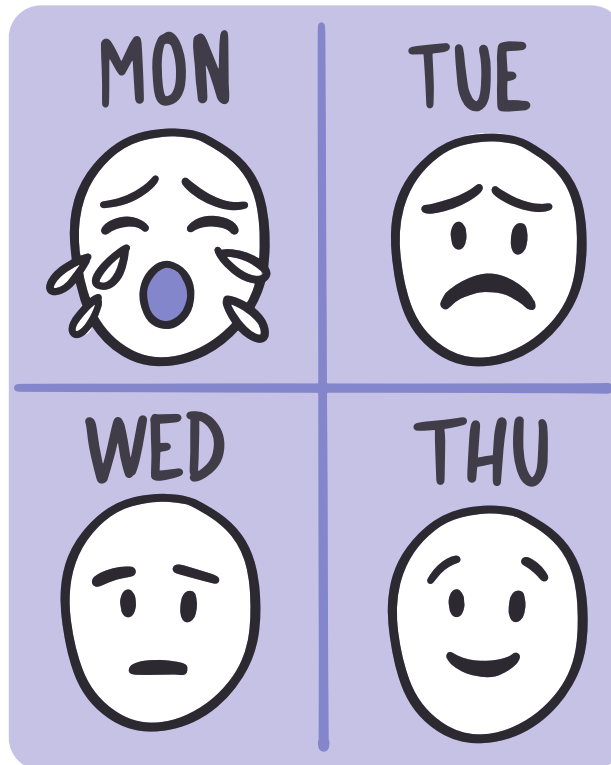
That's because we all have different "temperaments," or combinations of personality traits that are biologically based. These are fairly stable over time.

"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.

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."

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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



Wise Choices Signs and Symptoms of a Mood Disorder

If you’ve been feeling down or lacked energy for a while, talk with your doctor. Here are some things to look for:

- 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

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. ■

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Web
Links

For more about mood and your health, see “Links” in the online article: newsinhealth.nih.gov/2019/01/shake-it-off

Managing Multiple Sclerosis

Treatment Can Delay Future Attacks

Most of the time, multiple sclerosis, or MS, starts mildly, with unpredictable symptoms that can seem baffling. Without treatment, the disease can worsen to the point that you can't write, speak, or walk.

MS starts when the body's **immune system** slowly attacks the fatty coating around nerves. Without an intact coating, communication between nerves and the brain becomes impaired. However, it may be years before the first symptoms appear.

The symptoms depend on which parts of the brain and spinal cord are affected. A typical symptom is blurry vision in one eye. It may develop over a day or two. It may be painful to move the eye. Or, you may have double vision. Another typical symptom is not being able to move or feel a leg.

These symptoms, also known as MS attacks, may last for days or weeks. Most people will have one attack that resolves over time. Later, they might have other attacks.

MS is usually diagnosed when people are young adults. But it can be diagnosed at any age. No one knows exactly how many people have MS. In the United States, at least 400,000 people do.

MS can be detected with an MRI scan of the brain and spinal cord. Areas where the immune system has



attacked the coating around nerves will show up on an MRI scan.

MS is a complex disease. Nobody knows why it starts. If you have a family history, your chance of developing MS may be greater.

"We know that genes play a major role," says Dr. Daniel S. Reich, an MS expert at NIH. Research shows that hundreds of genes are involved. Most of these genes are related to the immune system and the **inflammation** that it drives.

Researchers have noticed that your chance of developing MS may be lower if you don't smoke and you maintain a healthy weight. They've also found that people who have not been infected with a common virus known as Epstein-Barr virus seem to be at lower risk of developing MS. But researchers don't know why.

People who live near the equator seem at lower risk too. Researchers believe that it may be because there is more consistent sunlight there, which helps the body make vitamin D. Vitamin D may help the immune system work better and protect against MS.

"There is some kind of complex series of risk factors and triggers that may need to occur in a certain order," Reich says. "But it's very hard to figure out."

MS can affect different people in very different ways. It can range from very mild to severe. Being diagnosed and treated early on can help prevent the disease from becoming more disabling.

"We now have more than a dozen effective medications that greatly reduce the number of new attacks," Reich says. Imaging tests

show that these treatments reduce the level of brain inflammation in people with MS.

Doctors hope that these treatments, and others under development, will help delay or even prevent MS from getting worse. ■



Wise Choices

Early Symptoms of MS

Talk with your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Blurry or double vision
- Painful eye
- Leg and arm muscles that feel weak and stiff
- Painful muscle spasms
- Feeling numb or tingly in the legs or elsewhere
- Having trouble keeping your balance when walking
- Having problems with bladder control
- Feeling dizzy all the time

Definitions

Immune System

The system that protects your body from microscopic threats.

Inflammation

Swelling and irritation caused by the body's protective response to injury.



Web Links

For more about multiple sclerosis, see "Links" in the online article: newsinhealth.nih.gov/2019/01/managing-multiple-sclerosis



Health Capsules

For links to more information, please visit our website and see these stories online.

Certain Ovarian Cysts May Not Need Monitoring

When women experience pelvic pain and abnormal bleeding, doctors can use ultrasound imaging to help find the cause. These scans often also find growths in the ovaries.

The most common type, called a simple cyst, isn't usually harmful. But because of concerns about ovarian cancer, doctors may monitor a cyst with imaging over many years. Some women even undergo surgery to determine whether a cyst contains cancer.

Researchers analyzed data from a

large health care system to find out whether monitoring simple cysts helped detect cancer early. They collected medical records from more than 70,000 adult women who had pelvic ultrasound tests.

The team estimated that about 23% of the women younger than 50 and 13% of those over 50 had simple cysts. None of the cysts in the women younger than 50 were later diagnosed as cancer. One woman over 50 with bad pain was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

The study suggests that women with simple cysts are no more likely than women with normal ovaries to have ovarian cancer.

"Our study found that asymptomatic simple ovarian cysts of any size should be considered normal findings in women of any age and ignored," says Dr. Rebecca Smith-Bindman, who led the study at the University of California, San Francisco. "Following these cysts with additional imaging does not lead to the detection of ovarian cancer." ■

How Much Activity Do You Need?

Are you and your family getting enough exercise? Being active can help you improve your health and feel better. It can lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of chronic diseases, like type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

Physical activity can boost your mood right away and help sharpen your focus. It can also reduce stress and help you sleep.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently updated advice about how much

physical activity you and your family should try to get. The new Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans is based on the latest research on how activity affects health.

Adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week. You can start with just 5 minutes at a time. Swim, garden, walk the dog, dance, or bike your way to feeling better. Whatever gets you moving counts!

Strengthening your muscles is important too. At least two days each

week, get those muscles working with things like push-ups or lifting weights.

Children ages 3 to 5 should be physically active for at least 3 hours throughout the day. Kids 6 through 17 need at least 1 hour per day.

All of your physical activity adds up. Moving more often throughout the day can help you get enough activity. Visit health.gov/moveyourway to find fact sheets and other resources for parents, kids, and more. ■



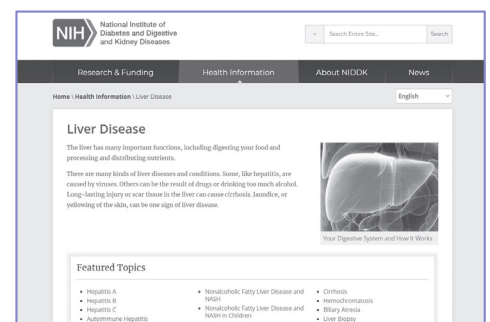
Featured Website

Liver Disease

www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease

Your liver is an important part of your digestive system. A liver that isn't working properly can lead to health problems.

Viruses, drugs, and alcohol can harm the liver. Learn more about these and other causes of liver disease.



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