

# **Beating the Winter Blues!**

## **- Six Tips for Improving Mood**

### **Tip 1: Stand Tall!**

Become aware of the space immediately above your head, and gently grow into that space. It may help to imagine that you are being pulled upwards by a golden cord attached to the centre of your head! There is nothing like good posture to increase your energy, and enhance your mood, and how we hold ourselves affects our body image too.

Depression or low mood is often accompanied by collapse in the body; we feel 'under the weather' or that 'we have the weight of the world on our shoulders'. By contrast, when our mood is up, we feel we have a spring in our step, or are walking on air.

Growing tall, and letting go of muscle tension, will help us to regain pleasure in movement. It takes pressure off tired joints, frees up our breathing, and gives a feeling of spaciousness. We will tend to feel slimmer, and more confident in ourselves. Low spirits can lift in minutes.

### **Tip 2: Dance to the Rhythm**

To combat winter lethargy and stagnation, exercise really is key. Just 10 minutes brisk walking, for example, releases mood-boosting chemicals into the bloodstream. It will also increase our energy, and make us more alert, both of which will have a knock-on effect on the rest of our day. Other activities will feel easier, both physically and mentally, as we increase our sense of vitality and resourcefulness.

I would suggest picking something that you feel inspired by at the outset; willpower can peter out in the best-intentioned of us, whilst intrinsic enjoyment of our chosen activity is more likely to keep us on course! Enlisting an exercise buddy or playing our favourite music can up the enjoyment, and ensure that it remains rewarding rather than burdensome. Getting kitted out in the right gear can also strengthen our resolve and commitment by helping us to feel the part.

### **Tip 3: Start the Day with a Stop!**

First thing in the morning is a good time to create some space. Use a little quiet time to de-clutter the mind, and shed what belongs to yesterday. Then try asking yourself questions like: 'What is it important for me to do today?' and 'What do I need to do to look after my wellbeing (and that of close others) today?' Take time to listen to your intuition; your bodily feelings, as well as your thoughts.

It's a little like setting your own metronome, and gaining focus, before getting caught up with the inevitable demands and distractions of the day. You have a kind of mental structure, and are less likely to be overwhelmed by events which might otherwise threaten your peace of mind. At the end of the day you can reflect back and consider 'How did it go?' 'What could I do even better, or differently, tomorrow?'

### **Tip 4: Finding Flow**

We can all get anxious or low when demands on us seem to exceed our ability to cope with them. However, under-stimulation can drag us down too. For optimal mood, it may be best to do things which feel challenging, but still do-able.

We can't necessarily pick and choose our work activities, but we can use our leisure time wisely. Research suggests that happy people tend to favour active pursuits, over passive pursuits (e.g. learning a new skill, rather than watching television).

Once absorbed in something we enjoy, we tend to lose all sense of time and get a sense of flow, or at-oneness, with our project. And the sense of achievement we feel when we reach a goal we have set ourselves will do wonders for our self-esteem, and thus our mood. Ultimately, when we feel a bit low, it may be more important than ever to do things which make us feel good, competent and happy!

### **Tip 5: Take Care with Commitment**

Gandhi once said 'A "No" uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a "Yes", merely offered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble"! Over-committing to other people can sap our emotional energy, such that we end up feeling burnt-out and resentful.

The next time someone makes a request of you, buy some time, and listen to your inner voice. Being able to come back with a "No" to something that just doesn't sit right with you, for whatever reason, will help to simplify and de-stress your life, and give you a great sense of empowerment. *You*, not the other person, is in control. Being assertive (as opposed to passive or aggressive) is a key antidote to depression. All it takes is a little practice!

### **Tip 6: Shall I Stop Procrastinating...or...!**

If you sit for a moment and honestly reflect what is bugging you, chances are it is unfinished business or decisions not made! Don't let perfectionist tendencies or avoidance stop you deciding what needs to be done, or saying what needs to be said. Sometimes even a bad decision is better than a decision not made at all; usually we can make the choices we have made work for us in the end. It's all about taking back control, and moving on.

Even if it's the dreaded dental visit you have been putting off, remember – by facing your fears, it's you taking care of you! You will feel lighter in mood, and more energised when you have taken decisive action in those areas of your life that are unresolved or that you have put on hold.

***Article written by Sarah Graham (MSc Health Psychology)***