

## Mood Boosting Secrets for Better Health

Looking for ways to brighten your mood — that won't mess with your health? You're in luck. Whether you're feeling a little blue or worried, stressed-out or snarly, there are plenty of ways to perk up without wrecking your body — or robbing your piggy-bank. And practicing positive pick-me-ups will not only make you feel better — they'll enhance your well-being.

### **Break a Sweat — Outside**

Taking a walk — especially outdoors, in a park or by a lake — is a guaranteed way to break out of a negative mood. Studies show that mood and self-esteem improve significantly even after short bouts of green exercise — defined as exercising in the presence of nature. Being physically active near a body of water has even greater effects.

But even indoor exercise can lift your spirits. One study found that a single 30-minute bout of moderate-intensity walking improved mood in people with major depressive disorder. Another study linked a single bout of moderate-intensity exercise with a 12-hour mood boost. Even 10 minutes of exercise can dramatically increase feelings of calmness and relaxation.

For best results, experts recommend a moderate pace — because higher intensities can promote a more negative mood state. Limit competition — especially if you're new to exercise — to help reduce anxiety and frustration. Choose activities that make you feel good while you're doing them, and avoid excessive exercise — which can lead to undesirable mood effects. And invite a friend to join you for a workout to increase the fun factor.

### **Socialize More**

If you're always on the go, you may prefer a quiet night at home over meeting friends for dinner. But making the effort to connect more is vitally important — because research links the strength of our social ties with mood, health and longevity. Loneliness and isolation have negative health effects, but having a strong social network helps buffer life's hassles and dramas.

A recent study of over 34,600 adults found those who didn't have regular contact with close friends had an increased risk of major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder (chronic depression that is less severe than major depressive disorder), social phobia and generalized anxiety disorder.

Don't be shy — ask a co-worker to join you for coffee. Include at least one social event in your weekend plans — invite another family over for game night or go for a walk with your neighbors. Reach out to your friends just to stay in touch — or to make specific plans.

### **Share Your Time and Talents**

Volunteering out of genuine goodwill — not obligation — has been linked in several studies with better mental and physical health. Lending a hand on a regular basis — about 1-2 hours a week — promotes a strong sense of purpose, expands your social network and can even reduce your risk of depression. People who volunteer early in life score higher in measures of physical function and have better health later in life compared to non-volunteers. And several studies have linked volunteer service with increased longevity, even when adjusting for physical health, age, socioeconomic status and gender.

Making a difference in your community — or in someone's life — feels great. Whether you're teaching a child how to read, planting trees or serving on the board of a non-profit, pitching in is a serious mood-booster — why not give it a try?

