

[IMAGE]

Five Things You Can Do To Boost Your Mood

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Your mood is something that affects many aspects of your health from your heart to your thyroid to your sleep cycle to your menstrual cycle. So, as the daylight hours start to wane this winter season, how can you keep your mood elevated?

I always tell my patients in my integrative medicine clinic in San Jose, CA that mood is affected by many things. So, in order to address your mood concerns, you have to be willing to optimize many aspects of your life. But if you can do so, not only will your mood improve but also your overall health.

There are five easy ways to keep your mood elevated this winter season:

1. Stay in touch with your loved ones
2. Keep touching your furry friends
3. Light therapy isn't a thing of the past
4. Keep your kitchen stocked full of vegetables and avoid sugars
5. Keep your body moving throughout the winter season

Social support is something that is important in managing our mood. When we are surrounded by friends and loved ones, we manage our stressors and mood triggers better. Try to focus your time and energy on your friends and loved ones who are positive. If you are not in the best mood, don't spend more time with people who are negative in your life. When you are feeling down, that is the time to find people who lift you up...not bring you down. I know that during the holiday season, there are a lot of social obligations, but just remember that you are the most important obligation and if you are already feeling low, find those who are uplifting to spend time with until your mood is better. You deserve to feel loved and cherished, so find those who make you feel this way to spend time with for the time being.

exercise - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Pets and animals seem to cheer people up and so if you are an animal person, you should spend time with your pet or spend time with your friends who have pets. Studies suggest that pets bring joy and those with pets feel happier.

I know that many of you have heard of light therapy during the winter season for seasonal affective disorder. If you have that, you should check with your doctor for support and potentially discuss the option for counseling. But if your main issue is the lack of light during winter time, you should look into investing in light therapy at home. If you have a healthcare account, ask your doctor to see if you can use that to get reimbursed for the machine to use at home.

What we eat can trigger our brain to secrete different chemicals. So, if you eat a diet high in antioxidants, minerals and vitamins in the form of vegetables and avoid sugars, your mood will likely be more stable. Many of my patients find that a diet rich in vegetables and low in processed foods and sugars help their mood quite a bit. But if you are depressed, the safest thing is to first see your doctor about it but in the interim, eating clean and healthy will only help.

Finally, exercise is always helpful for mood because when you exercise, you release more endorphins and helps to trigger better mood. If you are stressed and busy, exercise doesn't mean you have to go to the gym. You can even go on walks and hikes with your buddies...this way you can combine tip number one and five together and you can spend time with loved ones while exercising.

At the end of the day, the most important thing is to find support and ask for help when you need it. Your doctor cares about you...let him/her help you find some way for you to feel better because sometimes you need stronger options to help with low mood, so make sure to see your doctor to make sure you're OK. But in the interim, these five tips should help you keep your mood up throughout these winter months.

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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