“Do It Yourself” Mood Boosters

We all feel blue, grouchy, anxious, or stressed out from time to time. The good news? There are lifestyle changes that can be effective at improving mood, either alone or in combination with counseling or medication. But be patient with yourself; making a change may be hard, and it may take time before you start to feel better.

**Exercise.** It’s a known fact—exercise improves mood. But how often, how long, and how intense should you exercise to improve your mood? Guidelines suggest aiming for 45 to 60 minutes of aerobic activity three to five days a week, working at 50 to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate. Consider exercise as part of your regular treatment plan to boost health. Talk to your doctor about what exercise program is right for you.

**Meditation.** Mindfulness meditation programs show evidence of improving anxiety and depression. Techniques used in meditation can reduce stress, shift thoughts away from things that cause anxiety, and focus on keeping your mind in the present moment. Benefits seem to be linked with as little as 20 minutes a day.

Interested in working with a health coach? Learn more at [PacificSource.com/member/condition-support-program](http://PacificSource.com/member/condition-support-program), or email us at yoursupport@pacificsource.com.

Find Our Newsletter Online! Find this issue, as well as links to resources on our website. Simply visit [PacificSource.com/member/condition-support-program](http://PacificSource.com/member/condition-support-program).

**Yoga.** Studies have shown that yoga can have positive benefits for people with several types of mental health conditions, including depression. Stretching, breathing, and relaxation during yoga can benefit people—with or without mental health challenges.

Yoga is generally safe for most healthy people when practiced under the guidance of a trained instructor. If you have a health condition, it’s a good idea to talk with your doctor before you begin.

Put your hands to work and do what you enjoy. In her book “Lifting Depression,” neuroscientist Kelly Lambert suggests that we are all wired with a brain circuit system associated with the symptoms of depression. This circuit, which she calls the “effort-driven reward circuit” (EDRC), connects movement, emotion, and thinking and offers us natural resistance to depression. Physical activities that involve our hands, particularly activities that produce tangible products that we can see, touch, and enjoy, drive the EDRC. Knitting, tending a garden, building, drawing, painting, sewing, and pottery are some examples of tangible results that give pleasure or have meaning for their creators.

Continued inside.
Focus on and take in the good things in life. In his book “Hardwiring happiness,” psychologist Rick Hanson suggests that taking in experiences of the good things you want in your life weaves these positive experiences into your brain so you can take them with you wherever you go.

If you continually rest your mind on self-criticism, worries, and hurts, your brain will be more vulnerable to a depressed mood. On the other hand, if you regularly rest your mind on good events and conditions, such as someone being nice to you or completing a simple task, over time your brain will have more strength and resilience hardwired into it.

Consider using “antidote experiences” to counteract negative mental material. See table above.

If you are feeling...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Look for and experience...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear or worry</td>
<td>Seeing your own strengths, and noticing you are all right now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness or loss</td>
<td>Happiness, beauty, pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequacy or worthlessness</td>
<td>Being recognized, appreciated, or prized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Make taking in the good a regular part of your life. The brain is a system that, like a muscle, gets stronger the more you exercise it. This simple practice can have profound changes to your mood and how you respond to events in daily life.

Help Is Available

Often, family and friends may notice warning signs of depression before you do. It's important to talk with them about their concerns and seek help. People with chronic health conditions who get treatment for depression may also see an improvement in their overall health and are better able to treat their condition.

You can complete a free depression screening online at: mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-screen/patient-health. If you think you may have depression, work with your doctor to come up with an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan that is best for you.

There are many different treatments for depression. Often the first line of treatment is medication and psychotherapy or counseling.

Psychotherapy/Counseling: A common psychotherapy style for depression is cognitive behavior therapy, which helps a person to change negative thinking and feelings associated with depression.

Medications: For some people antidepressants can help reduce or control symptoms. It may take multiple attempts with various medications to find what works best, and typically they do come with side effects. There are several classes of antidepressant medications. If you think an antidepressant may be right for you, talk with your doctor.

Remember, there are many options and support services for depression. You are not alone.
Resolve to Have a Healthy New Year

The start of a new year is a natural time to take stock of your health and healthcare. An essential component to good health is partnering with your doctor to ensure you are getting the best treatment for your specific health condition. Here are a few recommendations to consider including in your health plan for 2016.

Dental Health — Beyond the Basics

Properly caring for your teeth not only keeps your smile looking its best; it can help you avoid a variety of dental and other health problems. You probably know the basics — visit your dentist at least twice a year, and brush and floss your teeth at least twice a day. But what else can you do?

1. Be thorough — set a timer and brush your teeth for a full two minutes. Less than that, and you may be leaving behind bacteria.
2. When brushing, include your gums along with your teeth. This will help stimulate blood flow and improve your gum health.
3. When flossing, wrap the floss around the tooth in a C shape before moving it up and down; this will cover more of the tooth surface. And don’t forget to floss along the back of the teeth in the very back of your mouth.
4. Some medications can affect oral health. Talk with your doctor if your oral health has suddenly changed after starting a new medication.
5. Avoid smoking tobacco or using smokeless tobacco products.

Resources:
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): NAMI.org/Learn-More/mental-health-conditions/depression/treatment
Mindfulness based cognitive therapy: MBCT.com

Depression Warning Signs

Here are some common signs and symptoms of depression:

- Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping much longer than usual.
- Loss of interest in food, or overeating as a coping mechanism.
- Lack of concentration or difficulty making decisions.
- Lack of interest in usual activities or losing the ability to experience pleasure.
- Feeling hopeless, like nothing good will ever happen
- Irritability or restlessness
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts

Eye exam: Have a dilated eye exam at intervals suggested by your doctor. Report any visual changes promptly. Changes in your vision could indicate a rise in your blood sugar and lead to permanent damage.

Blood pressure: Keep your blood pressure under 140/90, and talk with your doctor about the best target for you.

Urine test: Get a yearly urine test to check your kidney function. Controlling your blood sugar and blood pressure can help prevent kidney disease.

A1C testing: This test tells you your average blood sugar level over the last three months. Knowing your A1C gives you feedback on how well your diet, exercise, and medications are working to reduce risk of complications from diabetes. An A1C test is recommended at least twice a year in patients meeting their treatments goals and quarterly for those not meeting treatment goals or that have a change in therapy. Talk with your doctor about your goal A1C and what it means for you.

A1C testing:

Eye exam:

Blood pressure:

Urine test:
Directions
1. Preheat oven to 350°. While oven is heating, cut acorn squash in half lengthwise and remove the seeds. Drizzle 1 tsp. of the olive oil over the flesh of both halves. Season with 1/8 tsp. salt and ground pepper to taste. Line a baking sheet with foil and place the squash flesh side down. Bake for 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a sauce pan bring the water, quinoa, 1/4 tsp. salt and 1/2 tsp. lemon zest to a boil. Turn to low heat and cook until water is absorbed and quinoa is light and fluffy—about 10 minutes.
3. While quinoa is cooking heat remaining olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and cook for a few minutes until soft. Push the shallots to one side and add in the almonds, cook for a couple of minutes to toast. Remove pan from heat.
4. When quinoa is done, place in a medium bowl and toss with 1 tbsp. lemon juice. Mix in the almond shallot mixture, pumpkin seeds, cherries, spinach, and oregano.
5. When acorn is done baking, place each half on a plate and scoop 3/4 cup of the quinoa mixture into each squash. Serves 2

Nutrition Facts Per Serving
- Calories: 390
- Total fat: 13 g
- Saturated fat: 1.5 g
- Trans fat: 0 g
- Cholesterol: 0 mg
- Sodium: 370 mg
- Total carb: 62 g
- Fiber: 9 g
- Sugars: 9 g
- Protein: 10 g

Ingredients
- 1 acorn squash
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/8 tsp. salt
- Fresh ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup uncooked quinoa, rinsed
- 1 cup water
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 lemon to obtain:
  - 1/2 tsp. lemon zest
  - 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds
- 1/2 cup roasted pumpkin seeds (also known as pepitas)
- 1/4 cup chopped dried tart cherries
- 2 cups baby spinach chopped
- 1 tsp. dried oregano

Adapted from Stone Soup Blog October 2013, Recipe by EA Stewart, RD. Foodandnutrition.org/Stone-Soup/October-2013/Quinoa-Pilaf-Stuffed-Acorn-Squash