

Katherine Horstmann Nutrition

Lifestyle tips to boost low mood

1) Deep breathing

Most of us, particularly when we are under stress, are shallow breathers without even realising it. This hinders the amount of oxygen that can be delivered to the rest of our body. Also, slowing our breath allows our heart rate and blood pressure to slow, reducing feelings of anxiety.

✓ An example of this is 'box breathing.' It is simply breathing in the shape of a box! Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4, breathe out of 4, hold for 4. Repeating this for 5 minutes is optimal and you can extend your breath for 5 or 6 seconds when it feels manageable.

2) Meditation

Meditation is something anyone can do and is, essentially, about trying to block out the outside world for a while, and allow our minds to feel some quiet and calm. Thoughts and feeling will still come and go but we learn to gently observe them and bring our awareness back to our breath. It is about trying to achieve an emotionally calm and stable state. It is not sitting cross legged and eyes closed for everyone - for some, it may be knitting, gardening, colouring in.

✓ Some good apps to consider are Calm, Headspace and Insight Timer. The 'Nothing much happens' podcast is lovely for adult bedtime sleep stories.

✓ If you find meditation never happens for you, try setting a daily reminder in your diary or phone. If you do it the same time each day (ie on waking or before sleep), it will become part of your daily practise and more of a habit.

3) Try yoga

Yoga and meditation have a very calming influence on the nervous system. In a recent study, BDNF levels (a protein very important for the brain) tripled after 3 months of yoga and mediation.

✓ Try downloading the Deliciously Ella app. For 99p a month, it is well worth it for the yoga sessions, meditations and recipes.

4) Get 8 hours of good quality sleep each night

Your body does so much of its restoration and repair while you sleep, in particular regulating cortisol, glucose levels and hormones.

✓ Identify any interruptions and try to minimise them as much as possible.

✓ Focus on sleep hygiene - lavender essential oil, cool sheets, an open window, no screens before bed, epsom salt baths etc.

✓ If worries or your 'to do list' keep you awake, keep a notebook handy and write them down.

5) Don't be afraid to ask for help

We are human, we are all vulnerable in our own way and life can be messy. Keeping it to ourselves makes it worse (trust me, I did that, it didn't work!). I often see a reluctance for people to seek counselling unless they feel there is something very significant like trauma, but there may simply be aspects of your character that you feel hold you back or that you'd like to understand more, in order to help you navigate through life.

✓ Counselling

✓ Letting loved ones know what you're going through and letting them know how you want them to support you.

6) Exercise

The link between exercise and the improvement in mood is strong, for enhancing immunity, helping sleep and digestion, strengthening muscles and bones (so particularly important in menopausal years) and improved circulation of blood and lymphatic fluid .

✓ Aim for 30 minutes of weight bearing exercise every other day - walking, jogging, tennis etc and find something you enjoy.

✓ The 'Couch to 5k' app is great if you'd like to get into jogging.

7) Drink enough water

Your body uses water in all its cells, organs, and tissues to help regulate its temperature and maintain other bodily functions. Because your body loses water through breathing, sweating, and digestion, it is important to rehydrate.

✓ Aim for 2 litres of fluids a day (with most of these being plain, filtered, water)

✓ Drink from a glass or a BPA free bottle.

✓ Consider adding berries or slices of lemon/lime for a change in taste.

8) Reduce your chemical exposure

Consider the 'cumulative load' of everything that we are applying / eating / breathing in and try to reduce or swap the things we have control of. Chemicals are linked in particular, to hormonal changes as many act as 'Xeno oestrogens' (meaning 'hormone mimicking').

✓ Eat organic food wherever possible and focus on the swapping the foods that absorb most of the toxicity (strawberries, spinach, kale, nectarines, apples etc).

✓ Our skin is our largest organ and also the first line of defence for our immune system. Soaps, shampoos, lotions etc. are a primary exposure to a long list of toxic chemicals like parabens, because they absorbed through the skin. Try the 'Think Dirty' app.

✓ Use aluminium free deodorants and essential oils in diffusers in place of room fresheners like Febreze. Cleaning products are another source of a lot of chemicals that linger in your house for some time (Method brand are better).

9) Support detoxification

We are exposed to so many different chemicals now and the body doesn't recognise them so it doesn't have a natural pathway to eliminate them. If toxins aren't excreted, they are stored in our tissues. Give your body a helping hand by supporting your liver and other modes of elimination.

✓ Have at least 3 days in a row with no alcohol each week (Tuesday to Thursday alcohol free works quite nicely).

✓ Exercise ideally for 30 minutes 3 times a week, - sweat can release many types of chemicals including some heavy metals.

✓ The lymphatic system is one of the main mechanisms your body uses to detoxify so do regular dry body brushing to increase lymphatic drainage.

✓ Deep breathing, regular bowel movements, rebounding, and sufficient water intake are other things that will support detoxification.

10) Practising gratitude

Did you know practising gratitude enhances dopamine and serotonin (the neurotransmitters responsible for happiness). This may be the last thing you feel like doing when you're very low but it really does help. Even in your darkest days, there are always things we can find that help us feel grateful, however small they might be (when you look back, you may decide they were actually big things). The science behind gratitude is once again strong, particularly the optimistic outlook that it encourages along with a chance to 'reflect' (something we do not do enough of in our time-poor world).

✓ Consider keeping a gratitude diary - writing down just a couple of things you have felt grateful for that day.