

## *Self-help for Low Moods*

Emotions come and go like the weather. They are the moment-to-moment reactions to life that inform our responses. Moods are background feelings, just as the seasons are a backdrop to the weather. They color how we see ourselves, our world, and the people in it.

Are you feeling drained... bored... irritable... hopeless? Do the things you used to enjoy leave you “flat”? Are you off from your normal patterns of sleep, appetite, or concentration? Do you wonder if life is worth living? Do you “beat up” on yourself for it?

If you have been experiencing a number of these symptoms for two weeks or more, you may be suffering from depression. One way to understand depression is that the body’s systems are “stuck” in a recuperative or “energy-conservation” mode. They need to be nurtured back to their “normal activity” mode. It would be a good idea to see your physician about your symptoms to rule out organic causes, and to collaborate on helpful changes.

Low moods often come and go on their own without leading to depression. Low moods and depressions can have a variety of contributing factors, including:

- Loss of a loved one or of work
- Anniversaries of losses
- Immune response related to stress, allergies, inflammation, yeast infection, or illness
- Hormonal fluctuations
- As a side effect of some prescription drugs or reaction to recreational drug or alcohol use
- Family tendency to low moods or mood swings
- Childhood losses or attachment patterns
- Recent or past experience of abuse, betrayal, or trauma
- Negative thought patterns
- Thinking in terms of “always / never,” “mind-reading,” or “predicting” the future
- A wounded conscience

Here are some things that are often helpful for low moods. If you wish, you may print this off and check which of these you would be willing to explore for your self-care. Before making changes in diet, supplements, or exercise it would be a good idea to check with your physician.

- Talking with a sympathetic friend
- Keeping a gratitude journal
- Listening to music that lifts you up. The brain attunes itself to music. Bach may help
- Praying about it. Asking others to pray with or for you
- Getting adequate daily intake of B vitamins
- Taking omega-3 fish oil, 3 grams daily
- Taking vitamin D3. In the Indianapolis area, consider a daily intake of 1,000 IU in summer and 2,000 IU in winter. Blood levels should be monitored by your physician
- Using a source of full-spectrum lighting in the winter months
- Exercising three times a week or more
- Reducing caffeine, sugar, fatty high-carbohydrate foods, alcohol, drugs—any of these can give a boost and leave you feeling worse
- Reducing exposure to negative conversations and exposure to negative or violent media programs

If you make self-help changes without satisfactory improvement, or if the very thought of the effort is too much, it may be time to talk with a professional counselor. Remember, low moods come from a variety of causes and there are many treatment options—the ones given here are very general. A counselor can work with you to create a personal treatment plan. There is no need to fight this alone.

—Nun Katherine Weston, M.A.

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