

Home help packs on managing low mood



For children, young
people and parents

Low mood

From time to time we all feel fed up, upset, and unhappy. This is part of being human—it's completely normal. Feeling low can happen for a number of reasons, including big changes in your life or experiencing particularly upsetting events. However, when a period of low mood lasts for a long time without an obvious reason, doesn't seem to be improving, and starts to really have an impact on your life, it might be helpful to think about what you can do to change how you feel.



When experiencing low mood, studies have shown differences in the brain and body compared to people not experiencing low mood, such as inflammation in the body and less dopamine activity (a neurotransmitter linked with motivation and reward).

Therefore, it is just as important to treat low mood as it is to treat a broken leg.

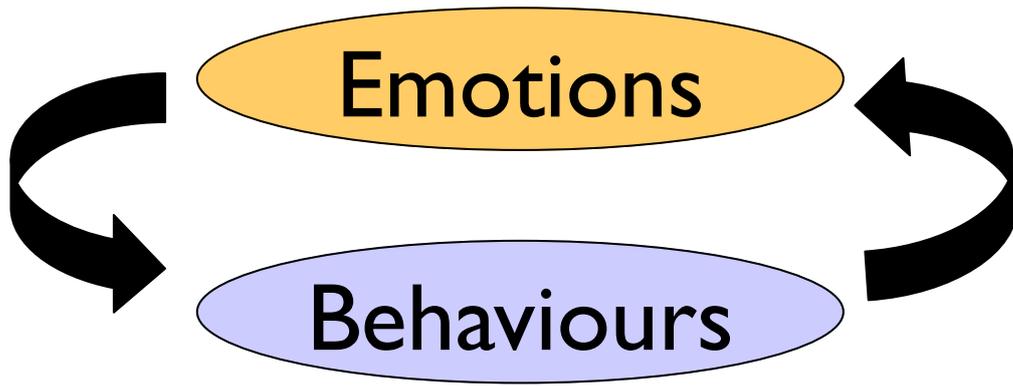
Signs of low mood include:

- Feeling tired, or struggling to sleep
- Lacking confidence
- Feeling frustrated, angry and worried
- Feeling anxious, or panicky
- Struggling to concentrate on everyday things
- Change of appetite



When feeling low, it can be really difficult to have the motivation to do anything at all. This might mean that you spend more time alone, perhaps in bed, and you might start to avoid social activities, friends and family members.

You might find yourself alone much more often, with little to distract yourself from your low mood and the thoughts that might be contributing to it. It seems strange that at a time when you feel like you can't or don't want to do anything, and don't want to see or talk to people, the opposite can be helpful to change this.



Often, low moods stop us from doing what we gain enjoyment from in life. So for example, if you are feeling low, and therefore have low energy and little motivation you are less likely to do something physically, or mentally, stimulating. Instead, you are likely to do things which feed the mood. By becoming more isolated, and less active, you are much less likely to start feeling better.

So we know that our emotions are linked to our behaviours, and vice versa. The more we do things that we enjoy, the better we will feel. So it is important to bridge the gap between feeling low and doing the things that we enjoy.



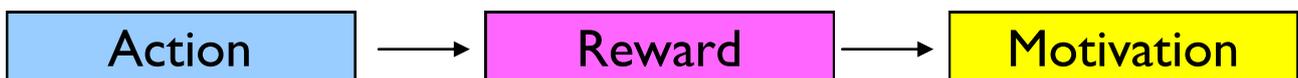
Think of the last time you did something for fun—what caused you to take the steps to do the ‘fun’ thing?

Normally, when we do something (whether it’s something active, crafty, academic etc), we do it because something is driving us towards it. This **motivation** takes many forms: whether it’s the drive to achieve something; a short term gain such as feeling good after ‘*the thing*’; a monetary gain; a long term gain such as getting fitter and so on.

As we’ve identified, it can be difficult to have this motivation to act when our emotions are low, and the longer we don’t do something the harder it gets. As a result, we need to do things a little differently:



Instead of waiting for motivation to come and find us, we almost have to trick it into being there. To do this, we might need to rearrange the order of events where instead of motivation leading to action and then reward, we can instead put the action first—in line with values and goals.



To better understand how our emotions are affected and when we feel better or worse, it is helpful to keep a record. Therefore, for the next week, use the table below to record your activity and mood. Rate what you do in each hour (it's okay to put that you've been in bed watching Netflix, just be honest) and your mood on a scale of 0-10 (10 being the best your mood can be). This can inform how you might make smart changes to start feeling better.

Hour	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
5-7am							
6am-7am							
7am-8am							
8am-9am							
9am-10am							
10am-11am							
11am-12pm							
12pm-1pm							
1pm-2pm							
2pm-3pm							
3pm-4pm							
4pm-5pm							
5pm-6pm							
6pm-7pm							
8pm-9pm							
10pm-11pm							
11pm-12am							
12am-1am							

Now take a look back at your activity monitoring sheet, and use it to think about the times that you were feeling better, compared with the times you were feeling worse. What kinds of things were you doing when you were feeling better? What were you doing when you felt worse? Record it here:

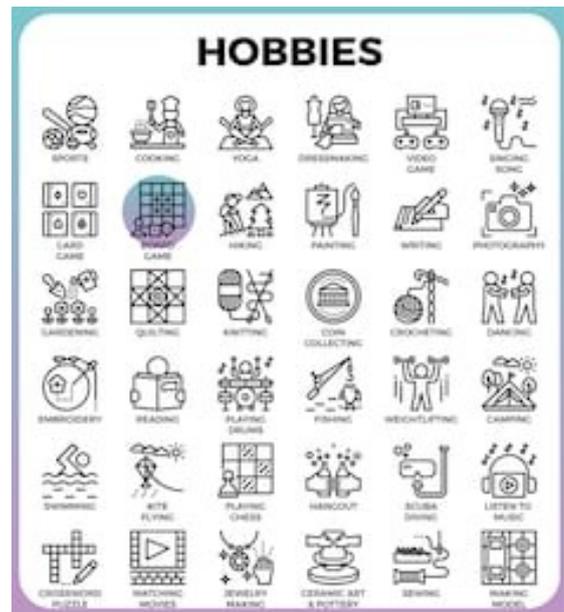
“Up” activities	“Down” activities



Enjoyment

Aside from doing things that relate to our values, there are some things that we do just for fun, because we enjoy them. There is not necessarily a greater goal for this, sometimes we just do things because we like it. This includes hobbies, social activities, things that simply pass the time and even things that we might eat and drink.

List some of the things you enjoy doing in the boxes below:



Hobbies/Interests

**Sensory experiences
(e.g. food, drink images,
touch etc)**

Social activities

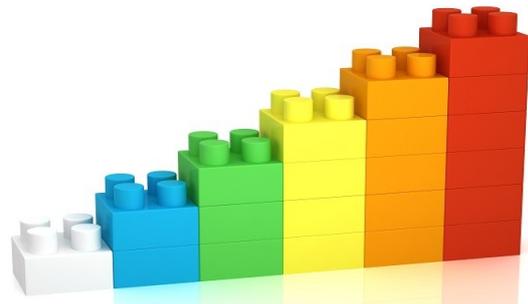
Other

Achievement

Alongside things we might do in line with our values, and that we might simply enjoy, there are things that we do because we want to achieve something: Whether that is a personal accomplishment, developing skills, academic achievement and so on.



Activities that involve the development of skills and achievement, such as school/work and sports, can lead to positive emotions and feelings such as pride, fulfilment, happiness and satisfaction. Think about areas in your life where you are able to achieve, or work towards achieving, something:



Meaningful daytime activities (e.g. school/college/academic/workwise):

Other skill based activities:

Goals

So now you should have a number of activities that are personal to you, and relate to your values, things that you enjoy just for fun, and things that you can get a sense of achievement from.

In order to put these into action in order to give our motivation and emotions a boost, it is important to translate all of these activities into goals. These goals should be specific rather than vague in order for them to be put into action, you should also be able to measure if you are achieving them (e.g. by the end of the month I will be able to do 20 push ups in one go). Finally, your goals should be realistic—if you have never painted before, you are not likely to be opening an art gallery in a months' time.



<u>Activities:</u>	<u>Goals:</u>
Values:	Goals:
Enjoyment:	Goals:
Achievement:	Goals:

So now that you have a list of goals that you can act on, it's time to schedule them in. Refer back to your mood monitoring sheet earlier in this booklet and use it to identify times when you can "book in" some of the activities which will help you meet your goals. Perhaps copy this table out and schedule in activities for the next week—giving you chance to spread things out rather than have them all booked into one day! Remember, goals and activities should be realistic. For example, if you have a goal related to school, you could schedule an hour for homework at a time in the day when you are less tired and therefore more able to think clearly—if that is 7 am, great. If it's 8pm, that's great too. Do what works for you. Once you've completed your activity, check it off and rate your mood between 0-10 (10 being the best it could be).

	Activity	Completed	Mood Rating
5-7am			
7am			
8am			
9am			
10am			
11am			
12pm			
1pm			
2pm			
3pm			
4pm			
5pm			
6pm			
7pm			
8pm			
9pm			
10pm			
11pm			

Routine

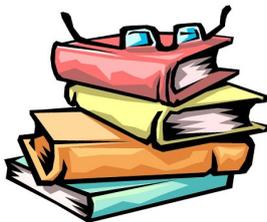
Another way to trick yourself and be more active with your goals and activities when motivation is difficult to come is to develop a routine that is consistent and easy to stick to!

Use this opportunity to give your usual routine a facelift, which includes opportunities to meet your goals, have a rest, and do things which will be rewarding—bringing back your motivation to act!



What time will you get up in the morning? Set an alarm and get up at the same time each day to keep a normal sleep schedule! This will give you more energy to make the most of your day! Start your day well by attending to your hygiene, getting dressed, and having a good breakfast

What activities do you have related to your values? Is there something about physical activity that you could start your day with? Exercise is important and helpful for our mental health and sends lots of endorphins into our bodies—making us feel happy and relaxed. Starting the day with some form of physical activity could give you the energy you need to continue with activities for the rest of the day! Anything from a walk, some stretches or a workout counts!



What does the main part of your day look like? Whether it's school, college, work... think about how your values and goals translate into activities for this area and how you will meet them!

Spend some time doing the things you enjoy—refer back to the 'enjoyment' part of this booklet and think about activities you've decided based on the things you enjoy doing! Allow this part of the day to be all about you and what makes you feel happy.

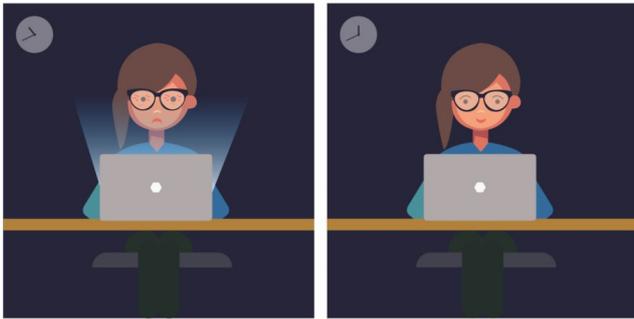


Choose a time to begin your night-time routine and think about what this includes. Perhaps putting away forms of technology (tablets, phone, video games) an hour before bed; a bit of night-time reading; washing your face and brushing your teeth; and then getting a good night's sleep ready for the next day! Sleep is very important for mood and having a good night-time routine will help provide the energy to do the things you've planned to during the day

Sleep hygiene

When experiencing low mood, it can be really difficult to have a good sleeping routine – whether this means you are sleeping too little or too much. Worries and concerns could keep you awake for longer at night, leading to falling asleep much later and therefore sleeping through the day.

That makes it difficult to be well rested and get up in the morning, and can have a big impact on our mood! So, it is important to make sure we have good sleep hygiene to reduce the impact of low mood on sleep.



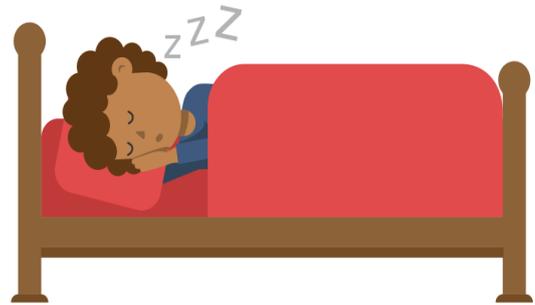
Try not to use anything with blue screens for at least an hour before bed—the blue lights will make our eyes think that it's daytime and our bodies will want to stay awake for longer. Perhaps instead you could read a book instead, or write in a journal..



Large meals before bed lead to feeling full, which keeps your body awake. Try to have a big meal for lunch and a smaller tea, a few hours before bedtime



As we know, routine is really important—especially for good sleep! Have a good night-time routine that includes a chance to relax and go to bed feeling ready to rest



Only use your bed for sleeping. This way your mind won't be tricked into thinking that when you're in/on your bed you want to be awake!



Keep the same wake up time and bed time 7 days a week—this will keep your body happy and it will know when it's time to rest!



A cosy bedroom that isn't too light at bedtime can be really helpful in drifting off to sleep quickly. Perhaps part of the bedtime routine can be to tidy up any clothes, and close the curtains

Sleep hygiene

If your sleeping pattern has become very different from a typical night's sleep (for example, 10pm—7am or similar), it might feel difficult to follow some of the sleep hygiene guidance. In which case, a more specific approach might be helpful. If you find you are not falling asleep until the early hours of the morning and are sleeping through much of the day, then it might be helpful to try to gradually move your sleep back to a more healthy pattern. To do this, you might keep a diary of the time you are going to sleep each night/morning for a week, then look at this and start making gradual changes:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Time I went to sleep							
Time I woke up							

Is there a pattern to your sleep/wake cycle? Is there anything you've noticed from looking at your diary? Perhaps there are some things you see that you can use to make changes yourself, if not, the following steps might be helpful:

Week 1:

Move your sleep back each night by one hour. This means that if you are going to sleep at 3am on average, try and go to sleep at 2am each night using the sleep hygiene steps.

Record a new sleep diary and the times that you are going to sleep/waking up. What do you notice?

Week 2:

Move your sleep back by two hours each night. So if you are going to sleep at 2am, try going to sleep at 12am each night instead.

Record a new sleep diary and the times that you are going to sleep/waking up. What do you notice?

Week 3:

Move your sleep back by one hour each night. You should by now be getting used to going to sleep earlier and waking up earlier. Keep using this weekly pattern until you get to a time that you are happy with and then use the sleep hygiene guidance to maintain your new sleep pattern.

Sleep Hygiene
The habits and practices that are instrumental to sleeping well on a regular basis

- 7-9 hours of sleep a day depending on muscle mass and activity
- Pay attention to circadian rhythm- know when your body wants to sleep between 10-6 or 11-7
- Every hour before midnight is like 2 hours instead of 1
- Wake up at the same time every day
- Get into an evening ritual to signify to your body that it's bed time
- Workout Late?** be sure to take a cool shower in order to cool down core temperature
- Sleep in a pitch black room
- Set room temperature between 65-68 degrees
- Have a lot of light in the morning
- A cooled down body is more set for sleep
- Proper levels of Vitamin D3 helps with a consistent circadian rhythm
- Avoid caffeine consumption within 6 hours before bed
- Remove all electronic devices (even cell phones) from your bedroom
- Avoid heavy meals 1.5-2 hours before bed (lean protein before bed is ok)
- Avoid water 1 hour out from sleep

{Better Nutrition=Better Sleep}

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