

3 PROVEN TIPS TO TURN THAT FROWN UPSIDE DOWN!



BY DR SHELLEY JAMES

FEELING BLUE? YOU'RE NOT ALONE!

We all feel down at some point in our lives: one in ten American adults, and one in six in the UK reported mental health issues last year.

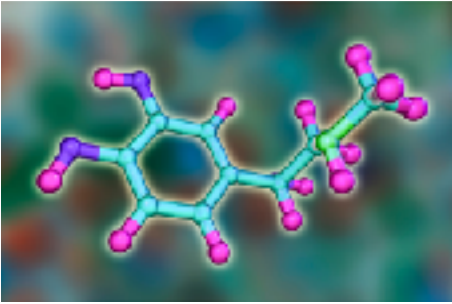
Your genes drive around half your natural tendency to see the glass 'half full' or 'half empty'.

The great news is that the right light at the right time can give your genes a helping hand!

Try these three proven techniques to help you and your loved ones to see the silver lining, even in dark times.



1/ TURBO-CHARGE HAPPY HORMONES



People suffering from depression tend to have lower levels of critical emotion-regulating hormones, including serotonin and dopamine.

Serotonin, sometimes called the 'feel good' hormone, supports focus and stability.

Dopamine, your 'natural high' hormone, is linked to motivation, bliss and euphoria. Bright light, particularly 'cool' daylight wavelengths, stimulates the part of the brain that regulates the levels of these hormones.

Getting outdoors for around 30 minutes, ideally before 9 am, has been shown to be better than an antidepressant to boost mood without the side effects of medication. This effect is partly thanks to the quality and quantity of light outside as the sun comes up. Morning light is especially rich in those sky-blue wavelengths that activate your hormone-regulating pathway. It's also surprisingly bright out there, even on a gloomy day. For example, a cloudy morning in the UK delivers 1,000 units of brightness or lux. That compares to a dim average of 300 lux or less in your home.

A SAD lamp can give your hormone levels a helping hand when the days are too dark, or you can't get outside. Look for a product that delivers at least 10,000 lux, ideally from a large surface area that can be positioned upright on your desk or table while you relax.

2/ TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY CLOCK



People who don't get enough sleep are more likely to feel depressed. The trouble is that we often find it harder to get to sleep when we feel down. Bright light in the morning will not only boost your happy hormone levels. It will also

set your body clock, so it's easier to switch off at night.

Making sure your room is dark at night is as important as getting enough bright light during the day. One study found that sleeping with the glow of a standard overhead lightbulb increased your risk of depression after just one night. Resist the temptation to snooze during the day. Naps, especially in the afternoon, will make it harder to sleep through the night. As a result, your brain will miss out on the stages of deep sleep that help you to manage anxiety and keep things in perspective.

Taking care of your body clock will also help to smooth out the ups and downs that happen naturally at different times of the day. For example, many people feel at their lowest ebb very early in the morning. That is when body temperature and hormones, including cortisol, testosterone and progesterone, are at their lowest levels too. We often feel another dip late

morning when blood sugar levels tend to fall. Many of us reach for a sugary snack or a coffee which leads to a crash after lunch and the cycle spins out of control. Setting a regular time to wake and sleep will cut down those extremes so you feel more balanced and in control.

Sitting by a window or investing in a lighting system that reflects the dynamic shifts of daylight at different times of the day can also help to lift your mood. Employers find that their teams are more motivated and productive when they have an outside view, even during the winter months. Patients in psychiatric wards who have a window recover more quickly, while dynamic lighting that reflects the time of day helps people with dementia living in long term residential care to feel more positive and relaxed and to sleep better too.



3/ GET IN THE MOOD



You can use simple changes to the lights - from bright and cool to soft and warm- to transform the atmosphere at the touch of a button. The simple act of taking control of your environment has a powerful impact on mood.

For example, an ambience that is soft and intimate tends to reduce inhibitions and help us to see others in a more positive light. You can even resolve conflicts and encourage a more collaborative attitude by switching to a campfire glow.

A bright and fresh atmosphere tends to support more conscious and responsible choices. Supermarkets sometimes change the lighting in the fresh food section to encourage us to make healthier choices. This open-air atmosphere inspires more public-spirited actions: picking up litter, for example.

Use light to remind yourself of happy times, to highlight a favourite photo or an object, for example. This simple visual cue will remind you that a brighter day is just around the corner.



CONCLUSION

You may be worried about a friend or family member who is feeling low right now. Depression affects all of us at some time in our lives. The great news is that light can help. Try these powerful, proven techniques to turn that frown upside down.

1/ TURBO-CHARGE YOUR HORMONES

Bright light in the morning will turbo-charge your happy hormones. Of course, outside is best: you'll get a breath of fresh air too. But artificial lights, including SAD lamps, will help in the darkest days and when you can't get outside.

2/ MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR BODY CLOCK

A regular bright day / dark night cycle will help you get a good night's sleep and manage the natural highs and lows. Of course, an outside view is best, but lighting that changes to reflect the sun's movement through the sky will help keep your mood on track.

3/GET IN THE MOOD

Taking control of the lighting can help you create the right ambience. For example, shining a spotlight on a photo or object that reminds you of loved ones and happy times will bring a smile to your mind.

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