

FALL

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Your EAP news

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Changing for the better: tips on boosting your mood

It's typical to feel grouchy or irritable some days. However, being in a bad mood that goes on too long may be a sign of a bigger issue. The good news is that certain healthy habits can help you boost your mood. "Some people are more moody than other people. Normal mood actually varies from person to person," says Dr. Carlos Zarate, chief of the National Institutes of Health's mood disorders group. For example, Zarate says, some people don't seem to be bothered no matter what happens. Others worry about minor things and tend to overblow them. People who have a more negative attitude tend to have a higher risk for mood and anxiety disorders.

What affects a person's mood

It's not only attitude that influences how you feel each day.

- **Daily habits** such as diet, exercise, sleep, or how much alcohol you drink also play an important role. Improving those areas can have a positive effect on mood.
- **Biological factors** such as hormones can affect mood. Women may experience shifts in hormones during their menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause, triggering mood changes. Men can have decreases in testosterone as they age, which have been linked to depression.
- **Certain medical conditions** such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, have been linked to depression.
- **Mental health conditions** like depression and bipolar disorder can also cause you to feel very sad and have low energy. Other mental health conditions, such as anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, and personality disorders, can cause mood issues as well.

It's okay once in a while for people not to have a good mood, Zarate says. "Moods that fluctuate occasionally are a normal thing. It's when it's combined with other symptoms — like significant distress and/or impairment of function or relationships — that it becomes an issue."

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Lecturas recomendadas para esta temporada

Tu programa Employee Assistance Program (EAP) también ofrece información útil en español. Para leer los artículos que enviamos este trimestre, visita anthemEAP.com y selecciona español. Encontrarás la lista de temas tratados en esta edición en la sección "Noticias para Usted."

Attention refocusing: a key to bouncing back

Changing your mood could be as easy as changing focus. With attention refocusing, you simply stop paying attention to whatever is making you unhappy and start putting your attention elsewhere. For children, this may mean finding a specific task to do when they're upset, like helping a parent with chores or finding someone to play with. For adults, it may mean having a conversation with a friend or going for a walk.

If you find yourself in a bad mood, try not to think about what's bothering you over and over again, and don't avoid or hide feelings. These strategies can make negative feelings stronger or last longer. For those with mood conditions, talking with a mental health professional can help to identify negative patterns and choose healthier coping skills. Also, avoid things that can trigger depression or anxiety, such as lack of sleep or not enough exercise.



Knowing the difference between a bad mood and a mood disorder

If you've been feeling down or have lacked energy for a long period of time, you may have a mood disorder. Here are some things to look for:

- Continuously feeling sad, anxious, empty, or irritable
- Feeling guilty, worthless, helpless, or hopeless
- Losing interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Low energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Having difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Having difficulty sleeping, waking up early in the morning, or oversleeping
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Difficulty controlling worries
- Aches or pains, headaches, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause

If you have these symptoms, make plans to see your doctor for a thorough check. If you have suicidal thoughts, call your doctor immediately or call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)**. Also, reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support in non-emergency situations.

Choosing childcare: your provider checklist

Selecting a childcare provider can be one of the most important decisions working parents make. Who is qualified to take on this life-forming responsibility? How can you be sure you're making the best decision for your child? Use this checklist of childcare must-haves, created by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Care, to interview and evaluate providers for your child.



- 1.** Is the program licensed? Ask to see the license. If they say no, ask why and then check your state's licensing regulations to make sure the program is not required to be licensed. Look at the program's past inspection reports and complaint history, as well.
- 2.** Are visits from parents allowed and encouraged anytime the childcare program is open? If you are not allowed to visit at any time, without calling ahead, think about a different program.
- 3.** Does the program have an appropriate number of adults for the number of children? This is known as the child-to-adult ratio. Recommended ratios are usually lower for younger children. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that childcare centers have no more than three infants under 12 months old for each adult.
- 4.** Are children, including infants, supervised at all times, even when sleeping?
- 5.** Does the director of the childcare center have a college degree in child development or a related field? Do teachers or the owner and operator of a family childcare home have a credential or college degree in early childhood education or a related field?
- 6.** Do all adults in the program receive ongoing training in working with children and child development?
- 7.** Is there a planned schedule for each day or week that encourages learning and activity?
- 8.** Is the environment safe, clean, and well maintained?
- 9.** Is there a written discipline policy that explains how behavioral issues are handled?
- 10.** Does the program feel warm and welcoming? Are the children happily engaged in activities?
- 11.** Are the adults actively involved with the children, and do they pay attention to the needs of each child?
- 12.** Have all adults working in the program had state and national background checks, including fingerprinting?
- 13.** Have the adults in the program been trained on how to prevent child abuse and how to recognize and report the signs of abuse?
- 14.** Is there someone present at all times who has been trained in pediatric first aid and CPR? Do staff know how to respond to an allergic reaction? Is there a first-aid kit available?
- 15.** Does the program have a clear, written plan to follow if a child is injured, sick, or lost?
- 16.** Is there a written plan for responding to emergencies and disasters such as fire or flooding? Does the program conduct regular fire drills?

Along with these must-haves, be sure the childcare facility suits your work and family life. It should be open when you need it to be, conveniently located, and affordable for you. Make sure the place you choose is good for all of you. To learn more, see the childcare search tool on your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) site.



6 tips for reducing your children's screen time

Screens can be a source of entertainment and social connection for children. For the past year, they've been a major tool in continuing their education. While screens can play a vital role, there are health benefits to limiting their use. Reduced screen time can lead to decreased obesity and improved physical health, as well as more time to play and explore, which are healthy activities for the mind.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends:

- No screen time for children under 2.
- One hour each day for children 2 to 12.
- Two hours each day for teens and adults.

These six tips can help you trim your children's screen time when they're not at school:

1. **Be accountable.** Set expectations with your kids, and set and track goals to reduce screen time.
2. **Be realistic.** If your kids spend a lot of leisure time on screens, including watching TV, start by setting smaller goals that are easier to reach. Instead of jumping to the recommended 1 to 2 hours or less each day, start by cutting their current screen time in half.
3. **Be engaged.** After school or work, spend time each day talking face to face with your children and give them your full attention.
4. **Put hand-held devices away.** During screen-free hours, put devices away or at a charging station in a common area so they're not attracting your kids' attention — or yours.
5. **Create phone-free zones in the home.** Start by making family meal areas a phone-free zone.
6. **Go outside.** Putting down the phone and taking a walk or playing outdoors increases your endorphins and provides that feeling of happiness in your brain, boosting moods and improving physical health.

Encourage your family to enjoy real life instead of the virtual kind. You can all benefit from the results.

Source: Mayo Clinic Health System. *6 tips to reduce children's screen time* (February 21, 2021): [mayoclinichealthsystem.org](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org).



Schedule a checkup with your doctor to talk about any signs of depression.

Important: This document is intended for general information only. It does not provide the reader with specific direction, advice, or recommendations. You may wish to contact an appropriate professional for questions concerning your particular situation.

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