

December 2017 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Change December Blues to December Cheer!



As a noun, blues is defined as melancholy, depressed spirits, despondency (e.g., rainy days make me feel blue). Cheer as a verb or noun is to shout for joy or encouragement, to give support, or to inject optimism in a gloomy season! We all have those “blah” days or days when we feel out of sorts. But why do they happen and what can we do about them?

Some reasons why we feel out of sorts!

- Brain chemicals: Some of us have brains that are more sensitive to the effects of stress. “*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* suggests that differences in the way our brain’s process a chemical called *galanin* makes some of us less resilient and able to bounce back after difficult experiences.”
- Weather: Less sunshine in winter months can lead people, some more than others, to feeling blue. Those who experience seasonal affective disorder may incur full-blown depression which may result in changes in sleep, appetite, and motivation.
- Insufficient levels of Vitamin D. Lack of exposure to sunshine, inadequate diet, or lessened ability to process vitamin D from sunshine or food affect one’s mood.
- Expectations of events/happenings in our lives. Expecting fair or special treatment all the time or expecting everything to stay the same is a recipe for disappointment. Broaden your outlook and focus on the good things and experiences that have happened to you.
- Negative thinking patterns. Researchers suggest that “prolonged stress in childhood can make our brains less interconnected and resilient.” When our brains get “stuck” in negative thinking patterns we become less able to change tracks and have less time for recovery and less able to bounce back. Sitting around brooding about disappointments leads to loss of motivation and action.
- The inner critic! “Do you have a critical inner voice constantly judging and criticizing everything you do, especially when things don’t go your way? The inner critic compounds the effect of anything negative in your life by blaming you for it.”
- Loneliness. Human brains are wired to be social. “Research using MRI brain scans shows that even minor social rejection lights up the same areas of our brains as physical pain. Feeling left out, rejected, or excluded makes us sad and can also lead to rumination about what is wrong with us that further darkens our moods.”

Consider the following suggestions as ways of helping you become cheerful and to act cheerfully!

*Put a smile on your face! *Focus your brain each morning on the good things and tasks to do each day.
*Think before criticizing or writing a negative note! *Say positive things to yourself! *Regulate criticism by ignoring peoples unwanted negative comments about you. *Enjoy the company of friends and neighbors.
*Create or try something new or look at diverse ways to overcome problems. *Admit the truth! *Focus on memories! *Review your daily/weekly schedule and consider taking a time-out or respite. *Practice gratitude (say thanks) and patience, especially when driving during this time of year or even when waiting in a checkout line. *Meditate, breathe, or pray to ponder the goodness of life. *Let go of past negativity or stop worrying about the future and focus on the here and now. *Be kind to yourself! *Give someone a hug! *Take a long walk! *Do some muscle stretches. *Stand up straight (you would be amazed how it can perk you up) and walk with a “bounce” in your stride! *Bake cookies or a cake and enjoy them! *Rely on yourself rather than others

to bring cheer into your life! *Buy yourself a ticket to a movie or concert! *Always remember that happiness comes from within!

Sources:

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