

Feeling better

Feelings of low mood and depression can become very strong and unbearable. When we feel like this we often don't do anything to help ourselves feel better.

You don't have to let your feelings take over. Try some of these ideas and see if they can help you to feel better. Keep an open mind and find out what helps you.

Relaxation exercises

Many famous celebrities, athletes and musicians use relaxation exercises to help them feel good and to prepare for challenges. Relaxation involves tensing each of the major muscle groups in your body and then releasing the tension. **This can help you focus your mind and relax.**

There are a number of audio guides that will take you through the process of tensing and relaxing your muscles. If you don't have one you can follow the instructions below.

- Choose a time when you won't be interrupted. Find a quiet, warm place and turn your phone off. Lie down or sit comfortably. You may want to shut your eyes but if you want to keep them open that's fine.
- Tense each muscle group twice. Tense it enough so that it feels tight but don't hurt yourself.
- Start by taking 5 deep breaths. Slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Now turn your attention to your feet and curl up your toes. Scrunch them up, count to 5 and release them. **Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.** Tense them again
- Move your attention to your legs and tense your calves by pointing your toes towards your knees. Count to 5, release the tension and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Tense your thighs by pushing the back of your legs against the chair or bed.
- Move to your stomach and tense this by sucking in your stomach and pushing your belly button towards your spine.
- Focus on your arms and hands and tense them by making a tight fist and curling your arms up towards your shoulders.
- Now tense your back by arching your spine and pushing your shoulder blades together. Count to 5, relax and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Focus on your neck and shoulders and push your shoulders up towards your ears.
- Shift your attention to your face and tense your chin and jaw by clenching your teeth and pushing your chin down towards your chest

- Finally, tense the rest of the muscles in your face by closing your eyes and pressing your lips together tightly and screw up your face
- As you release each muscle notice the tension fade away
- Return your attention to your breathing and enjoy this relaxed feeling.

TIPS & TRICKS

Try building these exercises into your daily routine. If you do this before bed it might help you to sleep better.

Quick relaxation

There may be times when you don't have time to tense and relax each of your muscles. A quicker way of doing this is to **tense each of the major muscle groups together**.

- Tense your muscles, hold them for 5 seconds and as you breathe out let them go and notice the tension fade away. Repeat this and enjoy that nice calm feeling for a couple of minutes.
- **Arms and hands:** Clench your fists and push your arms towards your shoulders
- **Legs and feet:** Push your toes towards your knees, gently raise your legs and stretch them out in front of you
- **Stomach:** Suck your tummy in
- **Shoulders and neck:** Push your shoulders up towards your ears and pull your shoulder blades together
- **Face:** Screw up your face, squeeze your eyes and jaw tightly, and push your lips together.
- The more you practice the easier you will find this.

TIPS & TRICKS

Make a regular time each day to relax. Making it part of your daily routine will remind you to practice.

Physical activity

Physical activity is a good way to improve your mood. **When you exercise your brain produces chemicals which make you feel good.** Think about the exercise you enjoy. It could be anything like

- swimming
- tennis
- football
- basketball

- dance
- a workout
- cycling
- running
- jogging
- walking
- cleaning your room

When you are feeling down, is there some form of physical exercise you could do?

TIPS & TRICKS

If you are feeling down, try doing something physical to help you feel better.

4-5-6 breathing

A simple way of focusing your attention is to concentrate on your breathing. This may help you to stop listening to the thoughts that maybe making your feel unhappy. **4-5-6- breathing is a quick way of helping you refocus your attention.**

It is very simple and can be used anywhere. People will probably not even notice what you are doing.

- Breathe in slowly through your mouth to the count of 4
- Hold the breath to the count of 5
- Slowly breathe out through your mouth to the count of 6

Repeat 3 times.

TIPS & TRICKS

To help take your mind off of your unhappy thoughts really focus on your breathing. It is very quick and easy to do so try and practice 2 or 3 times each day.

Mind games

You will probably notice your thoughts more when you feel down. We often

- Focus on our failures
- Keep going over the bad things that have happened
- Thinking about the future and that the worse will happen

The more you focus on these unhelpful thoughts the stronger they get and the worse you feel. Mind games are a **quick and easy way of distracting yourself** from your unhelpful thoughts. They help you to focus on the things that are going on around you rather than your internal thoughts. You can do this in many ways such as:

- Naming an animal with each letter of the alphabet
- Counting backwards from 147 in eights
- Spelling the names of family or friends backwards
- Using the letters from car number plates to make words

TIPS & TRICKS

Mind games can help you get some short-term relief. The mind game needs to be hard enough to make you think and try to do it as quickly as you can.

Change the feeling

Often it seems as if our feelings are in charge and control us. This isn't the case. There are many things we can do to help ourselves feel better rather than simply living with them.

If you are feeling particularly down don't just live with it, change it by doing something that makes you feel good. It could be anything like:

- watching your favourite comedy
- painting your nails
- baking a cake
- playing with a pet
- pampering yourself with a long hot bath
- gaming

TIPS & TRICKS

Make a list of the things that make you feel good. When you feel down try one of your feel-good activities to make you feel better.

Soothe yourself

Sometimes we might blame ourselves or feel guilty about things and think that we deserve to feel bad. No one deserves to feel bad so you need to be kinder to yourself. Look after yourself and **find ways to soothe and comfort yourself.**

One way you can soothe yourself is by stimulating your senses with things you find pleasurable. Really concentrate on what you are doing and don't let your mind wander. Pretend it is the first time you have ever smelt, touched, tasted, seen or heard these things. Find what works for you and what stimulates your senses.

- **Smell** - your favourite perfume, soap, fresh coffee, scented candle
- **Touch** - a smooth stone, soft toy, silky fabric, warm bath
- **Taste** - a chewy sweet, soft marshmallow, strong mint, refreshing apple, tangy orange
- **Sight** - pictures or quotes that make you smile, watching a fish tank, clouds drifting in the sky

- **Hearing** - your favourite music, birds singing, sound of the trees blowing in the wind

TIPS & TRICKS

Once you have identified the things you find soothing put them together. You now have a soothing kit ready to be used whenever you need it.

Talk to someone

Whilst other people can often be the cause of our distress and unhappiness, they can also help us to feel better.

If you are feeling down don't isolate yourself. If you do you will probably find yourself rehearsing what has happened or worrying about what will happen. Hard as it maybe, try to reach out to other people. Decide

- **Who could you talk with?** Who makes you feel good?
- **What do you want to tell them?** Do you want to share how you are feeling or to talk about other things?
- **What do you want them to do?** Do you need someone to listen to you, give you a hug, or help to sort out a problem? You need to tell them what you want.
- **How will you contact them?** You can arrange to meet them, telephone, text, email or use social media.

When will you contact them? As soon as possible so that you can start to feel better.

TIPS & TRICKS

Get a list of “feel good” people who you can contact when you are feeling down or unhappy.

Remember

When you feel unpleasant don't just live with it. Do something to make yourself feel better.

Develop your own toolbox so that you can make yourself feel better.

These methods won't always work, but the more you practice the more helpful they will be.