

It's good to be MOODY!

No one likes feeling low, but the pressures of modern life mean that some down days are inevitable. But what if we told you being in a grump can be good for you?

How are you feeling today? If, despite all your best efforts, it's better not to ask (you've fallen out with your other half, rushed your protesting child to school and arrived at work 10 minutes late), take a deep breath and prepare to hear the good news: you're normal!

Modern life has made us busier and more stressed than ever before, which, coupled with the hormonal fluctuations that naturally occur from our thirties onwards, can make for some pressure-cooker moments. But bad moods aren't all, well, bad.

'Bad moods are what we call "propulsive",' says psychologist

and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) practitioner Anna Hamer (ahamer.co.uk). 'Anger galvanises us into action, while a persistent low mood may prompt us to take stock of our lives, and anxiety makes us hyper-alert to potentially dangerous circumstances. In the same way that a high temperature alerts us to physical illness, negative emotions are there to protect us psychologically.'

Look at it this way – if we were never in a grump, how would we ever appreciate the warm, fuzzy feelings we have when all is well with the world? 'We wouldn't,' says consultant psychologist Ingrid Collins, of the London Medical Centre. 'We need the lows to appreciate the highs.'

Here, we reveal what your bad mood is trying to tell you...

YOUR MOOD: Angry/frustrated

Having too much to do and not enough time to do it in is guaranteed to result in simmering feelings of anger that boil over into all-out rage when someone unwittingly asks you to do one... more... thing. 'This is a common feeling for a generation of women who feel pressure from all sides,' says Ingrid. 'With growing families, elderly parents, jobs and homes to maintain, women feel they are not only bound by feelings of duty or guilt, but also by time. But you have to remember there's only so much one person can fit into one day.'

TAKE CONTROL In this context, anger is about feeling a lack of control. 'Anger can be put to good use, even if people associate it with destructive behaviour,' says Ingrid. 'It tells us something has to change. What household chore can you delegate (or ditch)? Is there a school or work commitment you can defer? Can you ask for help? There's no shame in getting support – it means you can fulfil all your commitments AND feel happier while you do it.'



YOUR MOOD: Persistently low

The stress hormone cortisol helps to keep us sharp in reaction to the demands of daily life. However, when we're under pressure, our stress response is constantly activated. 'This can affect the quality of your sleep, as cortisol stops you first falling, then staying, asleep,' says hormone health expert Dr Alyssa Burns-Hill (dralyssaburns-hill.com). 'It also affects your memory and lowers your immune system, making you feel as though you're permanently fighting off illness – not a feeling conducive to a jovial mood.'

TAKE CONTROL Alyssa suggests a saliva test (through a CLIA-certified clinic) for an accurate picture of what's going on. 'Many women are relieved when I give them their results, because there's a physical reason for their symptoms – it's not all in their heads.' If you think poor sleep is the root of your problem, she suggests a supplement called 5HTP (found in health food shops). It boosts the happy hormone serotonin, helping you sleep better.

YOUR MOOD: Perma-PMS

Feeling weepy, moody and super-sensitive could be due to the perimenopause, the term used to describe the period of transition into menopause. 'It can occur five, 10 or even 15 years before the actual menopause and can make you feel PMS-y for more than half the month,' says hormone therapy specialist Dr Aru Arasu, of the Marion Gluck Clinic in London

(mariongluckclinic.com). Progesterone, the hormone that peaks at ovulation, may be in decline, which is what makes you feel like you constantly have PMS.

TAKE CONTROL See your GP. 'You may have to give several blood samples over the course of one cycle so your GP can build up a clear picture of your hormonal profile,' says Aru. 'Support the body nutritionally and curb sugar cravings (common with oestrogen dominance) by eating plenty of fish, nuts and greens – organic, if possible. Xenoestrogens, chemicals that imitate the effect of oestrogen in the body, can cause further imbalances. These are found in everyday household products, from shampoo to plastic containers, so use glass containers for food and water.'

YOUR MOOD: Anxious

The classic signs of anxiety – feeling on edge and irritable – are a common reaction to a never-ending to-do list. 'Even without all the demands on our time, our lives are overstimulating,' says CBT practitioner Anna Hamer. 'We're constantly exposed to light, screens and noise, and our phones are ever-present. Our nervous systems are already at peak capacity and it only takes one small thing, such as a misconstrued email from your boss, for example, to tip us over the edge.'

TAKE CONTROL 'Arm yourself with tools to make sure anxiety never gets the upper hand,' says Anna. 'When you're feeling calm, practise deep breathing from the diaphragm, so that when you're feeling anxious, this comes naturally. Think about the breaths you might take if you were blowing bubbles – breathe in deeply and out steadily. Try using a positive mantra, too – "I'm capable of..., I'm good at..., I'm able to..."'

YOUR MOOD: Sad

Sadness is a normal response to big life events, like a divorce or a death in the family. But in our fast-paced world it can be hard to take the time we need to properly process our feelings. 'If something awful happens, you might react with sadness, anger, disbelief – whatever the emotion is, you must recognise it, allow yourself to feel it, and accept that it's how you're going to feel for a while,' says Ingrid. 'Grieving is a process that takes the time it takes. Acceptance is key.'

TAKE CONTROL When the sadness is less acute, consider what you can do that will help you move on from it – for instance, exercise. 'It doesn't have to be punishing, expensive or time-consuming,' says Alyssa. 'Try walking to or from work. It's a whole-body workout – and even just 10 or 20 minutes gives you the time and space to process your thoughts.'

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY?

'Genetics only influence our "set range" for happiness by about 30% to 50%,' says Anna. 'Positive emotions – such as happiness, satisfaction and contentedness – are linked to a person's beliefs and thinking style, which is learned. Our experiences in life are not about reality, as such, but rather reality filtered through our belief system. Those who are happy recognise the good things in their lives. They appreciate positive outcomes and believe they have things to feel glad about. Therapies such as CBT help us to change the way we think so that we feel happier.'

WHEN IT'S MORE THAN JUST A BAD MOOD

With about one in 10 of us in the UK suffering from anxiety and depression each year*, antidepressants can help. But, according to guidelines, GPs should discuss alternatives – such as talking therapies, diet and lifestyle changes – before prescribing medication in all but the most severe cases. 'People do worry about becoming addicted to antidepressants, but we don't believe they're physically addictive,' says Stephen Buckley, head of information for Mind (mind.org.uk). 'However, the side effects of coming off antidepressants, such as nausea and trembling, can be difficult to manage. GPs need to have an honest conversation with their patients about the pros and cons of this kind of medication. They're not prescribed lightly.'

Feature: Claire Lavelle Photos: Jumpfoto Source: *Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, via Mind