35 actions to improve your mood based on neuroscience book the Upward spiral1

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| **Go out in the sunlight** | Bright sunlight helps boost the  production of serotonin. It also improves the release of melatonin, which helps you get a better night’s sleep (chapter 7). |
| **Think of happy memories** | Happy memories boost serotonin  in the anterior cingulate (chapter 8). Try to think of one happy memory before you go to sleep—write it in a journal or just reflect on it. |
| **Make a decision** | Anxiety and worrying are provoked by  possibility, not certainty. In fact, many people are less happy when they have more choices, because they have more to worry about. So if you tend to worry, reduce your options and make quick decisions whenever possible. As soon  as you make a decision, however small, everything starts to feel more manageable (chapter 6). |
| **Pay attention to what you can control** | You can do this by simply paying more attention to what *is* in your control, which helps modulate your brain activity and quickly reduces anxiety. |
| **Take a deep breath** | Taking a slow, deep breath—inhaling  and then exhaling slowly—actually  calms down the sympathetic nervous system and reduces stress (chapter 9). |
| **Go for good enough** | If you try to have the best of everything,  you’re likely to be paralyzed by indecision or dissatisfied with your choice. In fact, this kind of “maximizing” has been  proven to increase depression. |
| **Avoid catastrophizing** | It usually starts with a perfectly reasonable worry, and then, through an incorrect assumption, it snowballs out of control. Well, you can’t control noticing the “alarm” in the first place, but you can reduce its negative impact. First, remind yourself of the more likely (and better) outcomes  (“Maybe my friend is busy right now”). Second, whether or not the worst-case  scenario is actually likely, make a plan to  deal with it (for example, “If my friend doesn’t call me back in three days, I’ll just call again,” or even “If my friend doesn’t  like me anymore, then I’ll hang out with another friend) |
| **Stay in the now** | Improving your ability to stay present, a practice known as“mindfulness,” helps enhance these activations and leads to  long-term improvements in anxiety and worrying. |
| **Notice what you notice non-judgementally** | Try practicing *nonjudgmental awareness*.  Nonjudgmental awareness is a form of mindfulness that simply means noticing without reacting emotionally, even  when things don’t turn out as you expected. |
| **Have a long hug** | A hug, especially a long one, releases a neurotransmitter and hormone called *oxytocin.* |
| **Good nights sleep, regular exercise and massage** | These all reduce negative views of the world  ( see chapters 5, 7, and 11, respectively). |
| **Do activities with someone else** | Not only is social interaction  good for depression (chapter 11), but social pressure will also help you exercise. Ask a friend, hire a trainer etc. Having an accountability partner makes it more likely you’ll show up. |
| **Think about what’s important to you** | When you connect your exercise or socialising with others to a long-term goal, it helps your brain overlook momentary discomfort and makes your exercise/actions  more satisfying (chapter 6). |
| **Make exercise simple and easy** | It’s much easier to convince yourself to do  simple, easy activities. Try starting with one push-up after you check your email in the morning. If you start feeling better and want to do more, go for it. Also consider yoga. |
| **Stairs or walking** | Consider a rule to use stairs instead of elevators for short rides and consider walking rather than driving short distances. |
| **Make a good decision, not the best decision** | Remember, it’s better to do something only  partly right than do nothing at all. |
| **Take action** | A decision without action is just a thought, and while thoughts can be helpful, they won’t have as powerful an impact on your brain. A decision with action is something else entirely: it’s a robust way to start an upward spiral. |
| **What’s important to you -your values** | **F**ocus on what’s really important  to you. What activities make you feel most fulfilled? What achievements are you most proud of? What good qualities would you want co-workers or friends to use in describing you? |
| **Decide for something you want, not against something you don’t want** | For example, instead of “I don’t want to do a bad job,” say, “I want to do a great job.” This type of positive thinking is more effective at  changing your behaviour. |
| **Avoid bright lights after the sun goes down** | You don’t need to walk around in the dark, but when it’s getting close to bedtime, turn off most of the lights in your house. |
| **Brighten your day** | Bright lights during the day help synchronize  your circadian rhythms and improve your sleep. So take a few minutes to go walking in the sunshine. |
| **Resolve/commit to change** | Making a resolution to change is more  effective than simply wanting to change, and dramatically increases your chance of success. Being specific in what you want to change helps make it more achievable. For example, “I resolve to work out more” is not as effective as “I resolve to go to the gym before work on Tuesdays and Thursdays.” |
| **Remember the good times** | Maybe you can remember a special birthday from childhood or a fun trip or even something as simple as a pleasant Sunday afternoon. If you’re having difficulty, talk to an old friend, look at photographs,  or read your diary from happier times. |
| **A splash of cold water on your face** | Sudden cold water on your face  slows down your heart rate by indirectly stimulating the vagus nerve. |
| **The power of music, singing and dancing** | All three can elevate your mood. |
| **Smile.** | It’s simple and improves your mood. The complex and amazing process of biofeedback will jump into action. |
| **Laugh** | The brain doesn’t distinguish much between  genuine laughter and fake laughter, and fake laughing can often lead to laughing at yourself for real. |
| **Wear sunglasses** | On bright days, we often contract our  Eye muscles while squinting to reduce glare from the sun. So while it might be a beautiful day, you’re sending signals  to your brain that you’re slightly upset. |
| **Write a detailed thank-you**  **letter** | Think of someone who has been especially kind to you—a friend, a teacher, a  Co-worker—whom you’ve never properly thanked. Write a letter thanking this person, being specific about what he or she  did that affected your life. Consider delivering the letter in person. This form of gratitude can have a long-lasting  effect. |
| **Keep a gratitude diary** | Take a few minutes every day  to write down three things you’re grateful for and say how you have made that happen. I am grateful for my friend Susan -I keep in touch with her. |
| **Be around people and keep up your social connections** | Downward spirals are more likely when  you’re alone. If you start to feel your mood sliding downhill, try going somewhere where there are other people around,  like a library or coffee shop. You don’t need to interact with others; just being in the same physical space can help. |
| **Reflecting on rejection** | We often experience something  as rejection when it’s really just a misunderstanding. One option is to hold this lightly until there is clarity, but if it is true rejection, it will still need to be held lightly. |
| **Talk to people you care about** | That doesn’t mean stalk them on Facebook. Email them. Call them. Even better, go for  a walk with them or meet for coffee—do  something fun. |
| **Do what you used to enjoy.** | It can be stressful if you don’t enjoy hobbies or activities anymore, but you can overcome  this with your own form of behavioural activation therapy. Make a list of things you  used to enjoy (playing tennis, going to the movies with friends, and so on). Recognize that your lack of enjoyment is only a  temporary situation and keep doing the things you used to enjoy, even if they don’t seem as much fun as before. |
| **See a professional** | Make an appointment with doctor, a nurse or nurse practitioner, a psychiatrist,  psychologist, or therapist. They’ve undergone years of training to help people like you. |

Reference 1. Copyright © 2015 by Alex Korb The Upward Spiral – using neuroscience to reverse the course of depression one small change at a time

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