

Mindfulness for a Messy Life



15 MOOD BOOSTERS FOR A MESSY LIFE

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The “messy” life I’m talking about here is not the “*I’m so busy I don’t even know what day it is*” kind of mess but rather the kind that gets made of our lives when we struggle with depression and/or anxiety.

If your depression has left you feeling depleted, defeated, diminished, and barely able to drag yourself through the day; if your anxiety has you ready to jump out of your skin, you know how messy life can get. Inside and out.

These are *15 Mood Boosters* I’ve discovered or developed to help manage my own “mess”. To elevate me when I’m really low, and regulate me when anxiety has me wildly dysregulated. And you’ll find that they’re great too, for when you’re in coasting-mode or even doing well, to help fortify those better states.

So give yourself a *Mood Booster Rx* and try one a day!

Write Yourself a *Thank-You* Note

When we're struggling with mental health (and all life's many other challenges), it's easy to overlook the good stuff. This exercise will help you start to recognize all the many things you have to appreciate about yourself.



1. List the actions you've taken over the years to support your mental and emotional well-being (eg. exercising, therapy, meditation, eating well, yoga...anything at all).
2. List any way in which you've helped others over the course of your life or made a positive contribution to the world (eg. treating people with kindness, volunteering, acting with integrity, being a loving parent/child/partner).
3. Name any qualities you possess that have positively impacted yours or others' lives, even if you don't feel like you're actively expressing them right now.
4. List any personal or professional accomplishments. Be sure to include things like managing your mental health because that is a serious accomplishment!

Give Yourself Some Good News

We've got bad news coming at us from every angle. Conflict, disaster, terrorism, scandal, and crises of every kind. Add that to an already challenging experience of depression and anxiety and you need to inject some positivity whenever possible! Check out these alternative news sources for a dose of good: [Good News Network](#), [YES Magazine](#), [The Optimist Daily](#), [Greater Good Magazine](#), and [Positive News](#). And if you'd prefer your news the good old fashioned way, check out [The Happy Newspaper](#).



Breathe Sweet Dreams

This powerful evening practice can combat nightmares and ensure a good night's sleep, and it's incredibly simple. I recommend doing this every night before sleep but if you forget, it can also be done if you wake from a nightmare. This is also a great breathing technique for whenever you're experiencing symptoms of stress or dysregulation.

1. **Breathe slowly into your diaphragm on the count of four.**
2. **Hold for a count of seven**, being sure to keep your body relaxed as you do.
3. **Exhale for a count of eight.**
4. **Repeat a minimum of 10 times**, fewer repetitions are significantly less impactful.

If you feel your jaw getting tight as you do this, you can soften it by stretching out your tongue as far as it can go, then keep your teeth separated when you close your mouth.

NOTE: There are a few things that do compromise the effect of this technique including short-changing any of the steps or having too much caffeine and/or sugar during the day-especially if it's late in the day (I know because I am guilty of all of these!).

Cozify

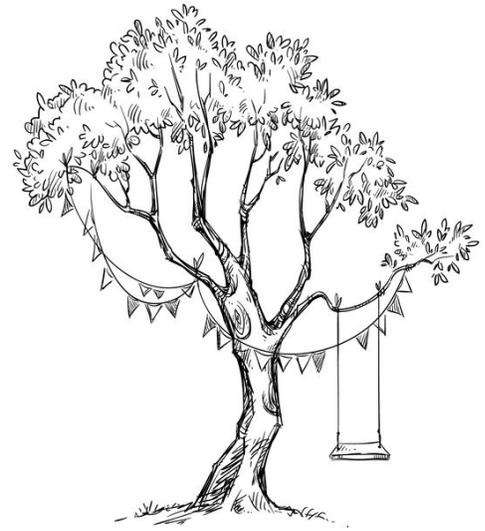
Everyone's mental health is affected differently by their physical environment. For some of us (like me) it has a profound impact; for others, less so. If you're amongst the 'affected', you may find that 'cozifying' a room (or two!) in your home can give you a great sense of comfort. You can do this in any number of ways: adding decorative elements like pillows or blankets (I'm guilty of a little Etsy-indulgence myself), lighting scented candles, decluttering or reorganizing your space.

And if 'cozifying' isn't an option (or just not your thing), try to find a space that just feels safe and warm-whether a cozy cafe, a library or bookstore-and spend some time there.



Get Out!

Even if you don't consider yourself a 'nature-person', being amidst trees, watching the ocean, strolling through a park, being in any natural environs can give you a sense of ease like nothing else. It's essentially a place free of 'triggers' (assuming of course you're not venturing through snake infested terrain!). And there's a good bit of research supporting nature as a stress reliever, energy and memory booster, as well as anxiety reducer, so see if you can give yourself the gift of some 'green-time' at least once a week. And if nature's not accessible, you can still get the benefits of fresh air, Vitamin D, sunlight, and exercise from a 20 minute walk anywhere!



Get (or give yourself) a Massage

fMRI studies show that massage triggers changes in regions of the brain involved in emotion regulation and the stress response. It also works to decrease levels of cortisol and activate the parasympathetic nervous system (the one that calms us). And if you've ever had a massage, you

know that all that science translates into greater relaxation and a better mood.

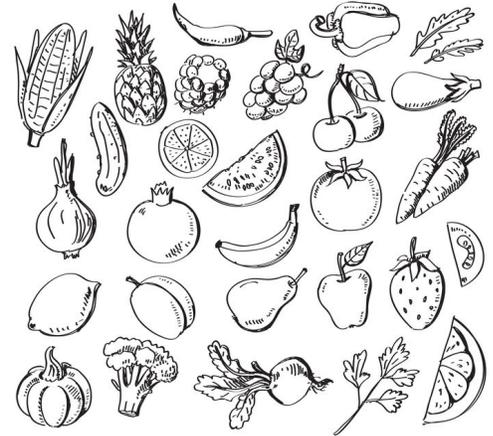


If you're able to get professional massage, awesome. For those of us limited by time or budget, a 20 min. foot or back rub at a local nail salon can hit the spot. And though it may not have quite the same relaxing quotient, self-massage, gives us most of the same benefits as the paid-for variety. Another stellar option (albeit one that often come with a hefty dose of "aayyeeee!!"), is using a foam roller. REI has some great suggestions on how to use one.

Drink Up

There are of course a million and one suggestions on eating for mental wellness but I'm going to focus here on my two favorite drinkable happifyers: green juice and ceremonial cacao.

Green juice: There may be some debate over green juices' potential for mood boosting, but I for one, am convinced of its efficacy. Now whether a result of the nutrient density or some other mysterious factors, it has done wonders for my mental health. Many people seem to get the biggest boost by including celery in the mix. I alternately add to that cucumber, kale, parsley, garlic, ginger, and a little apple for sweetness. It's best to drink this first thing in the AM and wait a bit before eating.



Ceremonial CACAO: This is cacao in its pure, traditional form, used by ancient civilizations for thousands of years.

Ceremonial cacao is 100% pure cacao-bean paste that contains an absurdly high quantity of health-restoring and mood-elevating minerals and neuro-chemicals (more than cacao powder, standard cacao paste, or dark chocolate). And if that weren't enough, ceremonial cacao also acts as a liver cleanser and circulation booster, while promoting the absorption of nutrients.

Drum it Out

In *Psychology Today*, sound therapist Gary Diggins is quoted as saying: "We moderns are the last people on the planet to uncover what older cultures have known for thousands of years: The act of drumming contains a therapeutic potential to relax the tense, energize the tired, and soothe the emotionally wounded."

Yes, the simple act of pounding on a drum can release pent up anger and get us out of our heads and into our bodies. If this sounds like something you'd be open to, do a Google search on local drum circles or you can purchase a small hand drum and Youtube "basic hand-drum beats" to get you started.



Get LOL-ing

Though laughter is likely the last thing on your mind when you're deep in the mire, this healing technique actually has a good bit of science to back it up. Laughter is proven to reduce pain, strengthen immune function, and decrease stress. And if you've ever had a hearty laugh in the middle of a stressful situation, you know the power it has to put the hard stuff into perspective (and help you take yourself a little less seriously!).

Here are some ideas on how to add a little levity to your life:

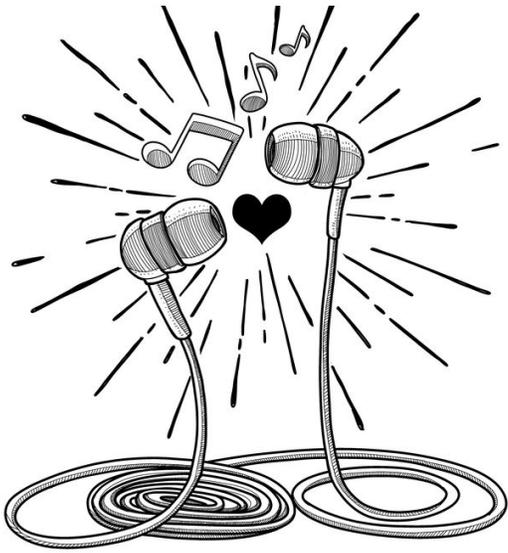
- **Get the funny up:** Find some funny cartoons, photos or greeting cards—anything that elicits a chuckle—and hang them up at home or in your office.
- **Keep a funny file:** Start a collection of your favorite comedies, standup routines (for some ideas, check out [Rolling Stone online](#) for their top 50 stand-up comedians of all time), and funny books (David Sedaris anyone?).
- **Make it ridiculous.** When you find yourself in a nerve-wracking situation (such as locking your keys in the car) or ruminating on an unpleasant exchange, imagine that you're a comedian charged with the task of rewriting the scene by blowing it up to absurd proportions.



For instance, if you're picturing a fight you had with your significant other, imagine exaggerating their body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, and amplifying every aspect of the exchange until it becomes full on ridiculous. Making the scene laughable helps to take the emotional charge out of it and give you some perspective. It may feel a little forced at first but trust you get a laugh out of yourself!

- **Hang with the laughers.** When your life feels like the humor's been drained out of it, spending time with those who appreciate a good laugh can prove supremely healing. And if you're lacking that particular kind of compatriot at the moment, a comedy club can also do wonders for refocusing you on the funny.
- **Try laughter yoga.** Yes, this is really a thing! According to Debbie Friend of *DoYouYoga*, laughter yoga "combines simulated laughter exercises with gentle breathing techniques to teach the body how to laugh without relying on jokes or humor." Check out five laughter yoga exercises right [here](#).

Listen Up



For many, music is a powerful force for healing. It can resonate on the level of our pain, reminding us that we're alone. It can make us feel heard and known in a way that nothing else can. It can draw us deep into our pain, pierce through and soften it. We can feel a million miles away from any recognizable emotion and then hear a song that pulls us right back through all those miles of distance, into our bodies, into the heart of something powerfully real and present.

I've created three (ever growing) playlists for different moods/emotional needs, that you can access here. The first is the ['You're Not Alone' playlist](#) which is comprised of songs that resonate deeply for me when I'm

supremely down. Whether the lyrics, the sound, or a combination of the two, these songs intensify the hurt in that cathartic kind of way that leaves you feeling a little lighter and a little less alone, afterwards.

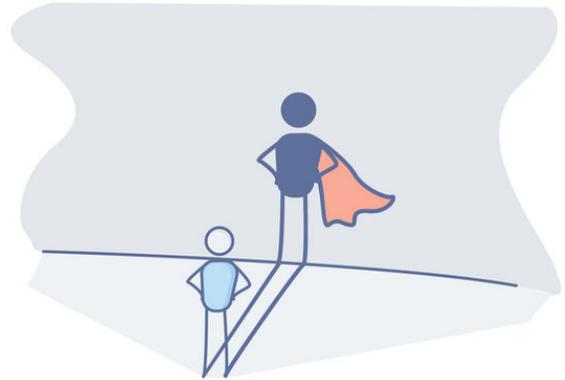
If you're looking for a mood boost, the [Some Good Cheer playlist](#) offers many genres of cheerifying, and if you really just need to hear something that will get you out of your head, the [Get out of your head \(and into your body\) playlist](#) should help to get you grooving!

Of course music is super personal and everyone responds differently to different sounds. Think about the music that has really impacted you, whether by giving you a sense of connectedness, aliveness, or calm, and consider making a mental wellness playlist for yourself.



Become a Superhero

This is an exercise I started doing as a kid and that can still give me a nice little boost when I need it. Here's how to get the benefit of visualizing yourself as a 'superhero':



- **Have you ever wanted to fly?** The ability to heal? To manifest massive amount of cash with the wave of a hand? Choose the superpower you most want, close your eyes, and imagine yourself having it.
- **For the next few minutes, conjure in your imagination, detailed scenes of yourself using this power—allowing yourself to go into full-on fantasy mode!** Whatever the image, stay with it until you get a felt sense of empowerment. For instance, when I'm in a low place, picturing myself with the ability to heal other people's pain gives me this sense of strength and confidence; when I'm in an anxious state, I find that images of myself flying over beautiful vistas really calms me.
- **And you don't have to stop at just one!** If you have the time, let yourself enjoy a succession of superpowers.

And if at any point during your empowering journey you find yourself getting judge-y, wondering why the heck you're doing or thinking *"this is silly"*, tell yourself this:

Our subconscious mind doesn't distinguish between what's imagined and what's real, so when you picture yourself saving the world, you'll experience the same feelings of excitement or elation you would if it were actually happening. This in turn builds the 'happifying' networks in our brains (known as positive neural pathways) which over time can make those emotions more readily accessible.

Do an Act of Kindness

Acts of kindness affirm the good in the world—the good that you can generate even with the smallest effort. Something as simple as making someone smile is enough, reaching out to someone in need, buying someone a cup of coffee, feeding someone's parking meter, anything concrete. Acts of kindness don't just pay it forward in the lives of others, they also have long term impact for you.

Science supports the supposition that doing something kind for someone else boosts our happiness levels by increasing the production of dopamine and oxytocin—two of the "feel-good" hormones. That's one reason why volunteering has proven so helpful as part of a treatment plan for depression.



Serving others in any way is tangible proof that we are capable and have something valuable to offer. And there is ample evidence that volunteering reduces stress, combats depression, prevents feelings of isolation, increases confidence, gives us a sense of meaning and purpose—and increases our capacity for happiness.

So whether you build into your life, an ongoing 'organized' act of kindness, or opt for the more spontaneous variety, challenge yourself to do something daily that you think will make a positive difference in a life or in the world (however large or small). You won't regret it!

Reach Out

There are so many reasons we don't reach out when we most need support. When we're in the depths of despair or overwhelmed by anxiety, it's hard to imagine anyone really understanding what we're going through let alone being able (or willing) to help. We may be afraid of appearing weak or out of control, or fear scaring people off.

The truth is, our mental health challenges may create discomfort or confusion for some of the people in our lives. Keeping our struggle to ourselves though will only leave us feeling more alone and despairing. Admitting we need help—whether a listening ear or something more involved—is the first crucial step in helping ourselves through a tough time.

If you're in need of support, consider who might be receptive to a request and reach out. If you're unsure of what to say, read over this list and see if any of these suggestions resonate.



"I'm not exactly sure what to ask for, but I'm feeling really (depressed/anxious/afraid) right now and don't want to be alone. Can we meet up?"

"Things have been really hard for me lately—emotionally/psychologically—and I could really use a friend, even just to do something fun and distracting."

"I'm having a hard time now and would be so grateful if you'd check in on me (daily/weekly/occasionally) to make sure I'm okay."

"Things have been rough for me lately. I could really use a little boost. If there's a nice memory you have of me, or just something about me you like or appreciate, would you share it with me?"

"I've been struggling a lot lately with my mental health and could really use your help in figuring out some things I can do to feel better."

"I could really use a friend right now."

And if reaching out is just not something you can do right now, try a Warm-Line. An alternative to a 'crisis-line', *warm-lines* are peer support help-lines where you speak with trained volunteers who have lived experience with mental unwellness. You can find a directory of *warm-lines* [here](#).