

Blue Mood, Red Flag for Depression

Six-city survey says 1 in 10 feeling down

(HealthScout) — Feeling funky in Phoenix? Merry in Minnesota? Anxious in the Big Apple? Then you've got plenty of company, says a new six-city survey of people's moods.

Most people cite interpersonal relationships at the root of their down-in-the-dumps feelings, but others are more bummed out by job-related stress, says the survey.

Levels of stress, anxiety and sadness high enough to have a regular negative impact on quality of life — though short of clinical depression — were reported by about 10 percent of the 2,000 folks surveyed in New York, Phoenix, Washington D.C., Houston, San Francisco and Minneapolis, say the survey.

The biggest stress-producer was other people's behavior: at work, in traffic or at home. But, few surveyed were finding ways to cope with the low mood.

One expert says dietary supplements could help. "There are several that I think are good alternatives [to prescription drugs]," says Dr. Michael D. Seidman, director of otologic/neurologic surgery and co-director of the Complementary/Integrative Medicine Initiative at Henry Ford Health System, Detroit.

SAM-e seems to enhance mood, Seidman says. But you shouldn't take it if you're using other antidepressant drugs. SAM-e is a derivative of the amino acid methionine, naturally produced in the body. Other mood enhancers include kava kava and St. John's wort, but they also come with warnings. Kava kava may make you sleepy and using it for too long may make your skin dry and give your nails and hair a yellowish cast. St. John's wort, like kava kava, shouldn't be taken with prescription antidepressants, among other drugs.

But, Larry Robinson, a Boston-based psychologist who runs Life Counseling and hosts a talk-radio program of the same name, says blaming a low mood on other people's behavior is wrong. "It's a question of self-esteem. You can't change another person and people should stop pointing fingers at others and look at their own expectations."

Robinson says he sees more than 60 people each week and tells them two things. "Look at your own reality, then look to the other person's reality." Until you can see "the person isn't out to deliberately hurt you, that the other person's just as stuck as you are," you won't make progress.

"There is no happy pill," Robinson says. He suggests, before rushing off to take kava kava or SAM-e, you should seek professional advice. Both experts, however, agree that exercise is good medicine. "I really believe part of everything is our self-image, and exercise helps us feel better about ourselves and lifts our mood."

The survey was conducted from Aug. 10 to Sept. 1 of this year by the independent research firm McNeill Lehman, for BASF, the makers of one brand of SAM-e. Telephone interviews were done with 1,800 participants, and another 360 interviews were done in person. Moods were assessed using a screening tool developed by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies of the National Institutes of Mental Health.

Survey results varied city by city

Topping the list for the "blues" were people in sunny Phoenix, with 15 percent of the population saying they considered themselves depressed, and another almost 10 percent reporting frequent low moods.

The seemingly happiest people hailed from Minnesota, with less than 8 percent feeling depressed, and about 9 percent feeling low.

In the Big Apple, almost 11 percent reported a low mood, with more New Yorkers citing job dissatisfaction as a reason than in any other city.

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