Ways to Cope When You're Feeling Grumpy

Everyone occasionally feels irritable, and these feelings are usually temporary. You may be "having a bad day" and feel cranky or in a bad mood. Little things may irritate you more than usual, like the slow driver in front of you, your computer, or the person having a loud phone conversation on the bus. Irritability is often a sign that you're under stress.

Paying attention to bad moods is important. Unless you manage them, they may influence your interactions with others and negatively affect your personal and work relationships. In his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman observes that the ability to resist and control negative moods is essential to our ability to work productively with others.

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Here are six ways to ensure that you reduce your chances for developing negative moods or turn them around quickly if they occur.

1. **Recognize that you're feeling grumpy.**

When you're feeling grumpy, you may be:

- impatient
- irritable
- rude
- angry
- short-tempered
- easily annoyed

The first step in managing your emotions when you’re in a bad mood is to recognise how you're feeling and acting. It's being able to stop for a moment and admit to yourself, "I'm really grumpy today." Once you're able to do that, you can work on finding outlets and ways to feel better so that you do not allow your bad mood to become evident to those around you.

2. **Pay careful attention to your physical health and your diet.**

When you're having a bad day, realising that you're feeling "off" physically can point towards solutions. A headache or a sore back can trigger irritability or make it worse. Feeling too hot or too cold or uncomfortable in a bad desk chair won't help. Often a bad mood can be caused by something as basic as hunger.

**Start the day with a solid breakfast.** Eating the right foods at breakfast can have all-day benefits for your mood. Avoid high-sugar foods that cause your energy to spike and then plummet. Instead, try low-fat yogurt, whole-grain cereals, fresh fruit, or whole grain bread with peanut or almond butter. Or have healthy leftovers like brown rice or whole-grain pasta with lean meat and vegetables.
Eat balanced meals throughout the day. Eat in moderation and avoid foods with lots of salt and sugar.

Avoid skipping meals. When you’re hungry you can feel irritable and short-tempered. If your work schedule forces you to go too long between meals, have a healthy snack, like a piece of fruit or a protein bar, to keep you going.

Limit your intake of caffeine. It can leave you feeling jittery—and grumpier.

Try to drink several glasses of water a day. Sometimes fatigue can result from being dehydrated, which can lead to grouchiness.

Avoid using alcohol or drugs as a way to relieve feelings of grumpiness. Try healthy ways to reduce stress, like getting some exercise or spending time with a close friend. Take stretch breaks throughout the day.

Stick to what some experts call the "80/20 rule" in your eating. If 80 percent of what you eat is healthy, then you can allow yourself to eat what you want for the remaining 20 percent. Searching for healthy, delicious recipes online can be a good motivator to eat lean foods.

3. Develop a support system.

Identify and make time for friends, both at and outside of work. People who can be trusted to hear about how you’re feeling can provide an excellent opportunity to work through your feelings. Work out who can help you lift a bad mood and find a more positive way to look at your situation. And if possible, avoid cranky people until a bad mood passes.

4. Get enough sleep.

Fatigue and lack of sleep can leave you feeling moody and irritable. Most adults need at least seven hours of sleep a night, on a regular basis, to feel rested and energetic. Getting less sleep—even for a couple of nights—can leave you feeling irritable, moody, and more likely to make mistakes. Many sleep experts offer this rule of thumb to determine if you're sleep deprived: if you can fall asleep in the daytime within 10 minutes of closing your eyes, you need to get more sleep at night.

5. Bring laughter into your day.

A good laugh can break a bad mood.

Bring a little laughter into your day. Spend time with fun people. Call a humorous friend or relative at lunch. Keep a cartoon calendar in your workspace. Or download to your phone a joke-a-day app or a few monologues by your favourite comedian. Look for entertaining comedy routines or sketches that are short enough to watch or listen to on your break at work—no more than five minutes—with earbuds. Find a way to chuckle today.

Laugh at yourself if you can. There’s a popular quote that turns up often on Facebook and Twitter. "I'm not in a bad mood. Everyone is just . . . annoying." It's amusing because it requires us to recognise that we need to take responsibility for our own moods.

Lighten up. Look for what’s funny and amusing in a situation.

Swap jokes with your child.
Research has found that moods are contagious. Being with upbeat people can make us feel happier. Spending time with people who are always complaining can make us feel irritable.

6. Make an effort to break the grumpiness cycle.

It's easy to accept a grumpy mood as a fact of life or to tell yourself, "There's nothing I can do about it." But there is. Here are some tips.

**Start your day off well.** The mood we bring to work has a powerful effect on us throughout the day, research has found. Plan and organize your morning routines to ensure that you have enough time to make it as pleasant and stress free as possible. If you can't avoid a long or frustrating commute, create a playlist of upbeat music—the kind that always puts you in a good mood—to listen to on the way to work.

**Talk yourself out of a grumpy mood.** Tell yourself, "I'm going to feel better." Remind yourself that your mood is temporary and that "this too shall pass." Coaches sometimes advise people having a bad day to "fake it until you make it," meaning, among other things, that sometimes acting upbeat will actually improve your mood. You start your day's work appearing to be cheerful, even if it feels forced, and keep going until the cheerfulness becomes real. This simple technique works quite often.

Take responsibility for your moods. Do not allow them to affect others.

**Make an effort to curb your impulses and control feelings of impatience and anger.** Take a deep breath when you are feeling angry. Breathe and count to five to help yourself stay calm. Regular exercise can be an excellent way to control and temper negative moods.

**Work on having a positive attitude.** Focus on the positive—on an upcoming visit with a friend or on the things that are good in your life. If you have more negative moods than you would like, read Martin Seligman's book *Learned Optimism* to learn practical ways to develop a more positive outlook.

**If you're feeling grumpy, remember to turn to that support system you've identified.** Seek out a trusted friend, relative, or colleague who can help your bad mood get better and help you see things more realistically. In his book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Nobel Prize-winner Daniel Kahneman cites research showing that people in a good mood performed more than twice as accurately in a test situation. Let other people help you reach a better frame of mind so that you can do your best.

**Take advantage of the schemes and benefits your company offers to assist you in balancing the demands of your work and personal life.** Contact your assistance program for resources and support.

**If your irritable mood lasts a lot longer than it usually does,** think about contacting a counsellor or therapist to get to the root of what's bothering you. Your doctor can give you a referral.

If you take care of yourself and remember to eat well, get enough rest, and make time to be with people you care about, chances are you'll feel less grumpy. And remember, it's OK to be in a bad mood once in a while—so long as you don't take it out on others.

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