

# Preventing Mood Problems

Sometimes medications do not work fully because of factors in our life that impact our brain negatively. Below is a brief list of everything you can do to enhance the results of your psychiatric medication and prevent future episodes of anxiety, depression and mania. Each of these steps has been found to help and to improve brain function.

This list is meant as a brief reminder. There is more detail and information on each ideas at [www.moodtreatmentcenter.com](http://www.moodtreatmentcenter.com) (click on *Recovery Guide*).

## **Behavioral**

1. Regular daily activity. If you keep regular habits of activity, eating and sleep (doing them at the same time each day - within 30 minutes), it will help to set your brain's neurohormones.
2. Walk briskly (30 minutes/day).
3. Mindfulness meditation (10-30 minutes/day).

## **Dietary**

4. Salmon two servings per week or Fish oil with DHA = at least 1000mg/day.
5. Diet low in saturated fats and simple sugars.
6. Avoid drugs, alcohol (in excess of ½-1 metric cup wine/day).
7. Avoid caffeine after 2pm.

## **Sleep**

8. Rise out of bed at same time each day (this is more important than going to bed at the same time)
9. If you have insomnia turn the lights & computers off at night, or try blue light filtering glasses in evening ([www.lowbluelights.com](http://www.lowbluelights.com) or Uvex

S1933X at amazon). Follow our website guide for more tips on insomnia

## **Other**

10. Morning sunlight and total darkness (no electronic lights) at night. Consider lightbox for winter depression.
11. Good physical health. Many health problems can increase your risk of mood problems.

## **Psychological**

12. A meaningful life (especially one where you have contact - directly - with supportive friends, and do activities which draw upon your skills and/or activities which get you "out of your head" - such as doing things for others)
13. Gratitude journal (each night record three things that went well that day or that you are grateful for; alternatively can use a CBT journal, e.g. *The Feeling Good Handbook*)
14. Social connections. A mix of friends and family - people that you see in person and that you feel you can trust and count on are most important.

Most of the steps above take 3-4 weeks to bring about a change in your mood. Sometimes, people won't benefit from any treatment until a critical step is taken, then all the benefits come in. For example, it would be hard for most mood treatments to work if you have active thyroid problems or untreated sleep apnea.

Sometimes you'll find that taking one step does nothing, but that you need to make several changes for everything to fall into place and work well. As an analogy, consider opening a door: you have to both unlock it *and* turn the handle to make it open. Doing one without the other does nothing.

*Chris Aiken, MD, updated 7/15/12*