

Why Am I in Such a Bad Mood?

Do you ever find yourself getting really irritable for almost no reason? Or suddenly feeling down without knowing why? Going from sadness to anger to joy in a matter of minutes can make many teens feel as though they're losing their grip. But why is the feeling of being on an emotional roller coaster so common among teens?

Dealing with constant change and pressure is part of the answer. Maybe you're starting a new school and not able to see old friends as much. Getting good grades or wanting to be better in sports or other activities can be a concern for many teens. It might feel as though there just isn't enough time to do everything.

Being a teen means struggling with identity and self-image. Being accepted by friends feels extremely important. Teens also may notice, for the first time, a sense of distance from parents and family. You may feel you want to be on your own and make your own decisions, but it can also seem overwhelming and even a bit lonely at times. As fun and exciting as this time is, it also can be a time of confusion and conflict. It can take a while for teens — and their families — to feel comfortable with the transition between childhood and adulthood.

Another important cause for mood swings is biology. When puberty begins, the body starts producing sex hormones. These hormones — estrogen and progesterone in girls and testosterone in guys — cause physical changes in the body. But in some people, they also seem to cause emotional changes — the ups and downs that sometimes feel out of control.

Understanding that almost everyone goes through mood swings during their teen years might make them easier to handle.

When It's More Than Just a Mood

Feeling irritable or short-tempered can be signs of depression. So can feelings of boredom or hopelessness.

Many people think of depression as feeling sad, but depression can also bring feelings of moodiness, impatience, anger, or even just not caring. When depression gets in the way of enjoying life or dealing with others, that's a sign you need to do something about it, like talking to a counselor or therapist who can help you deal with it. Also, if you ever feel like hurting yourself, that's more than just a bad mood and you need to tell someone.

Taking Control

Here are some things you can do that might make those bad moods a bit easier to handle:

- **Recognize you're not alone.** Although not every teen experiences mood changes to the same degree, they are common.

- **Catch your breath.** Or count to 10. Or do something that lets you settle down for a few moments, especially if you're feeling angry or irritable. Try to look at the situation from the point of view of a wise observer.
- **Talk to people you trust.** Friends can help each other by realizing that they're not alone in their feelings. Talking to parents is important, too. Parents can share their own experiences dealing with bad moods. Plus, they'll appreciate it if you try to explain how you feel instead of just slamming a door. Teachers and counselors are often good resources, and a doctor can help sort through questions about development. Keeping feelings inside can make them seem much worse.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise produces more beta-endorphin, a hormone that controls stress and improves mood. Go for a run, play some tennis, ride your bike, or punch a punching bag.
- **Get enough sleep.** Though it can be hard to find enough time, getting adequate rest is very important. Being tired can lead to more sadness and irritability.
- **Create.** Get involved in some sort of project, like starting a journal or diary, building something out of wood, or starting an art or music piece. Writing can help you organize and express your thoughts and feelings and will make things more manageable. Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation; the important thing is just to get your thoughts on paper. Do the same thing with paint, sculpture, music, or other art forms. Put your feelings into your artwork.
- **Cry.** There's nothing wrong with crying; in fact, it often makes a person feel better. However, if you find that you are sad, irritable, bored, or hopeless much of the time, or if you just can't seem to shake the blues, you might be depressed and need help from a counselor or doctor. If you're feeling stressed or angry a lot of the time, getting help could be very useful for you.
- **Wait.** Just as you can get into a bad mood for what seems like no reason at times, that mood can also pass. If your negative mood sticks around too long, though — or if it's interfering with the way you deal with friends, parents, school, or activities — then you may want to talk to a school counselor, parent, or therapist about what you can do to feel better.

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