



Seasonal Mood Enhancement

By Rich Bayer, Ph.D.

It's springtime. It's a time of change, a time of renewal. Just thinking about the spring season brings cheer to most people's minds.

With spring taking hold, we can feel the changes. They start in the environment around us and then spread to our own bodies and personalities. First we notice that the days are getting longer. Then we notice that it is getting warmer. Then we hear birds singing, we see trees budding, and the spring bulbs emerge. As these changes take place, we can't help but feel better. Why do these annual changes affect us in a positive way?

“Spring is nature's mood enhancer,” says Sheila Murphy, Community Relations Manager at Upper Bay Counseling and Support Services. She has a Masters of Creative Arts in Therapy (Non-Verbal Psychotherapy), and has studied the mind-body connection.

She states that three things change in humans in the spring. We show positive increases in mood, in energy, and in self-awareness. It appears that seasonal boosts in both light and temperature have a positive influence.

Even the words we use to describe ourselves show signs of seasonal enhancement. When spring is in the air, we tend to display a “brighter” outlook, reflect a “sunny” disposition, and enjoy “warm” feelings toward ourselves and others.

Murphy notes a number of interesting and subtle changes too. In spring we start revising our wardrobe. We wear fewer layers of clothing and less clothing overall. Consequently we begin to feel freer in our clothes, like we are lighter and looser, and more relaxed. Also we tend to wear fabrics that are less dense and we go for the spring colors, which both create a lighter, brighter feeling in our clothes.

Then there's the change of scents in the air. Outside there's the smell of flowers, the smell of earth and grass. And inside we begin to pop windows and let the fresh air in. All of these changes, she says, have a noticeable and positive effect on our mood, our self-awareness, and our energy level.

This is the time of year too when many of us do a self-inventory and begin setting some goals for ourselves. Perhaps even more important, we become motivated to make some changes. We may start bicycling, gardening, going for walks, or doing spring-cleaning. We may start exercising more, in part because we want to look better and in part because we want to feel better. We may even become more social and join a couple of groups or attend some local activities.

Spring actually enhances our ability to do more. Consider the job of spring-cleaning, for example. When we start out, we may not want to clean that living room or that closet but we do

it anyway. Then we feel better for a few days because we accomplished the task. The amount of daylight in each day starts increasing after the Winter Solstice on December 21.

Soon after that, many of us get inspired to become more active. George Patchell, Associate Director of the YMCA in Elkton, reports that there's a boost in attendance every year from January through March. He believes attendance drops off after March as people begin doing more of their activities and exercising outside. Melinda Bookwalter, co-owner of the Curves fitness center in Elkton, reports a similar pattern in attendance. She says the daily attendance remains strong from January through April, then declines.

Murphy states, "We as humans mirror the workings of the universe." As the days begin to have more light, we begin to feel more brightness in our lives. As the world begins to warm, we begin to warm to everyone around us. As the plants and animals begin to awaken from their winter sleep and show new life, we begin to show new life and become more active day to day. Surely the natural changes in springtime do enhance our moods. We experience it every year. The seasonal renewal plays a powerful role in improving our mental health. So enjoy it while it lasts.

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