

# BOOST YOUR MOOD

25 WAYS TO PUMP UP  
POSITIVITY IN YOUR LIFE.  
BY CAROLE BARROW

**Y**ou've heard it before: To keep the worst of winter blues at a distance, you've got to do things that will lift your spirits. Not so easy when holiday bills are high, temperatures are low and the days are far too short. But it helps to consider that there may be an abundance of warm glee glimmering just beneath the permafrost gloom. You do have to take an active role in your own spirit-lifting, and it may become a habit you enjoy—at the stove, in the gym or in bed (sleeping). Browse our suggestions for ways to shake off the winter blahs, pause and sample, and don't be stunned if they put a little spring in your step.

## CHANGE YOUR SCENERY

**1** Spend the summer months in the South Bay's sublime summer climes, stash your frequent flyer miles and sandbag your vacation time for the winter months, when the chill sets in. Getaway cruises to sunny destinations like Hawaii and Mexico are often priced to sell after the holidays. Or if snow is kind of your fancy, escape to a relaxing rustic cabin or book a trip to the slopes; Tahoe is a hop, skip and ski-jump away. Getting a change of scenery in the winter can provide an exhilarating experience.



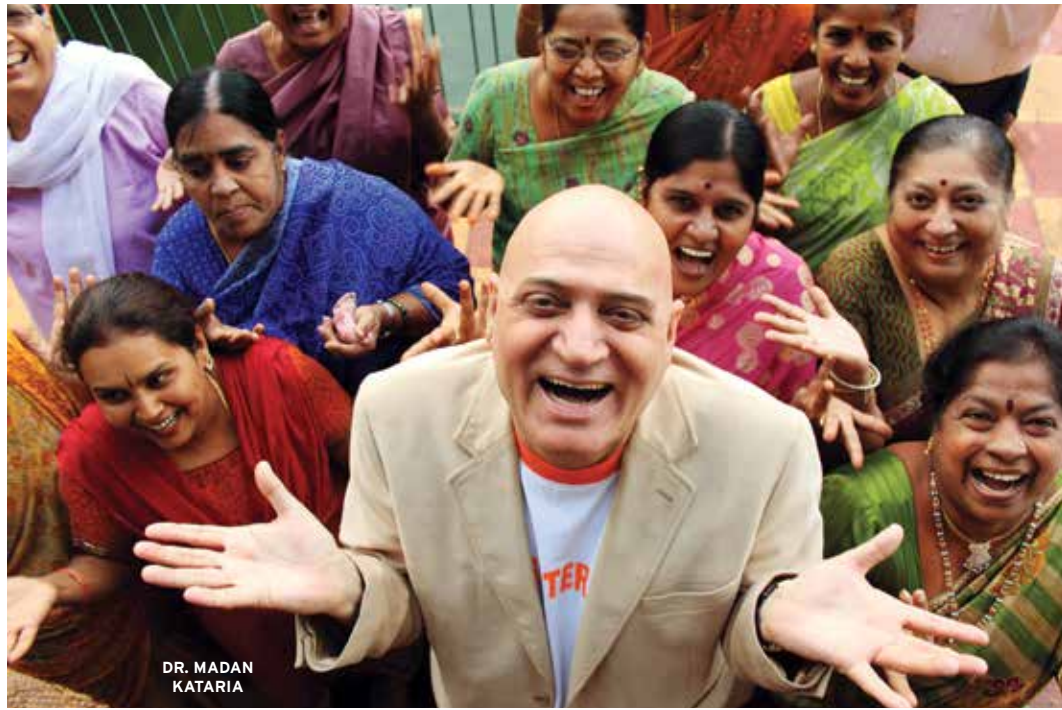
# 2

## GO HERBAL

Taking better care of your body boosts your well-being fairly fast. It helps the mind to manage most any difficulties, including anxiety and depression, very quickly," according to clinical psychologist John Duffy, PsyD. Palo Alto based Rebecca Cafiero, a lifestyle coach who is certified



in holistic health and integrative nutrition, extols the virtues of herbal remedies. "Turn to adaptogenic herbs like eluethero, ashwagandha and wolfberry to naturally manage stress. These super herbs assist the body in reducing stress and resisting the effects of it and are nontoxic."



DR. MADAN KATARIA

## LAUGH IT OFF

Kids laugh about 200 times per day; adults laugh an average of 15 times per day. Being a kid

again—silly, goofy—has life-enhancing effects. Even mimicking the mirthful act can influence attitude for the better. In fact, forced laughter

can have a profound healing effect on the body, according to Dr. Madan Kataria, a medical doctor from India who developed laughter yoga, a

practice that draws on the breathing exercises of yoga to produce therapeutic results. Tickle your funny bone and reap the rewards.

# 3



CYCLING CLASS AT FLYWHEEL SPORTS, SUNNYVALE

# 4

## LET'S GET PHYSICAL

In the aftermath of so much eating, drinking and being merry, chances are you've packed on a few holiday pounds. In addition to putting you on the path to a svelte silhouette, getting physical has the added perk of keeping the blues at bay. Numerous studies have shown that people who exercise regularly are

physically fit and mentally healthier. Why is physical exertion a proven depression buster? According to the Mayo Clinic, exercising releases natural cannabis-like brain chemicals (endogenous cannabinoids) and other natural brain chemicals that can enhance your sense of well-being. We'll give Mayo a high-five for that discovery.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: TIM BIEBER/CELEBRITY CRUISES; CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF YOGA LAUGHTER MOVEMENT; COURTESY OF FLYWHEEL SPORTS; COURTESY OF HERB PHARM



BLUE OAK RANCH RESERVE, MOUNT HAMILTON

# 5

## GET BACK TO NATURE

It's easy to get caught up in the urban grind and lose sight of the fact that we are part of nature, not separate from it. In a Stanford study, 38 Northern Cali-

ornians (18 women and 20 men) were split up into two groups, one which took a 90-minute walk in nature and another that did the same walk in the city. The nature walkers reported having fewer negative thoughts about

themselves after the walk than beforehand, while the urban walkers reported no change. Connecting with nature stimulates the senses and has been shown to help with high blood pressure, stress and anxiety.



YOGA CLASS AT BREATHE TOGETHER YOGA, LOS GATOS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ALICE CUMMINGS; SHUTTERSTOCK; LIZ KRAFT

# 7

# 6

## REACH OUT AND TOUCH

Touch releases hormones that combat stress. Massages decrease stress hormone cortisol while increasing happy hormones serotonin and dopamine, instantly improving your mood. Hugs also have a similar effect, with the additional boon of strengthening interpersonal relationships. Whether you decide to splash out on a splurge-worthy spa or get a good friend to give you a squeeze, it's a good idea to embrace the magic of touch.



## NAMA-STAY HAPPY

Just two one-hour yoga classes a week can help reduce fatigue and boost mood. Yoga is renowned for increasing flexibility and augmenting overall fitness. Now there is ample scientific evidence proving the positive effects of yoga for depression. It increases the level of an antidepressant neurotransmitter, GABA. Boston University researchers found a 27 percent rise in GABA levels in a group that practiced yoga, yet no change in GABA levels in a second group that read during the same time period. In a separate study, yoga also improved the vitality and disposition of men and women more than walking.



# 8

## GET INSPIRED

Find inspiration in everything from subscribing to a daily quote to listening to uplifting audio books on the way to work to reading magazines with exciting ideas. Plot a Pinterest board that features motivational memes or follow a nonprofit that showcases shining examples of people who go the extra mile to make a difference in the world.

LOS GATOS BALLET, NONPROFIT OF THE YEAR 2017



# 9

INTERIOR BY CATHERINE CANFIELD, AUSTIN DESIGN

## KEEP CALM AND COLOR ON

You may not be able to control your cranky coworkers or all that gridlock traffic during your daily commute, but you absolutely can tweak your home to transform it into a mood-boosting sanctuary. Some colors, like certain shades of blue, are known to be very calming and uplifting and may be the subtle factor that will help you bounce back after a rough day. Head to your nearest hardware store to pick out a color and start the transformation from dreary domicile to happily hued home.

COOKING CLASS AT SUR LA TABLE



# 11

## TEACH YOURSELF

When you learn something, whether it's a language or a musical instrument, it can redirect and enrich your thought life. Studies show that playing an instrument also helps in lowering heart rate and blood pressure, which in turn lowers the

stress hormone cortisol, thus making us feel relaxed. Feeling connected is another immediate benefit of learning a new language. Other skills, hobbies or pastimes—from bowling to woodworking to culinary arts—also enable us to network with others who share our newfound passions.

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## MUSICALLY MOTIVATE

Listening to favorite songs connects us with cherished memories, and can help access emotions and feelings that may be hidden just below the surface. Researchers at the University of Manchester found that an organ in your inner ear is connected to the part of



ROCKING THE BEOPLAY H7 HEADPHONES

# 10

## CATCH CONTENTMENT

Happiness is contagious. So say the numbers: We are 15.3 percent more likely to be happier when we know another happy person directly (first degree), followed by 9.8 percent and 5.6 percent for second and third degrees, respectively. When a friend of ours who resides within a mile from us becomes happy, the probability that we are happy increases by 25 percent. Those findings from a Framingham Heart Study that followed 4,700 people over 20 years tell us many things, one being our joy quotient is partially affected by the mood of our social network (not of the Facebook variety). Cheers to that!



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ANNAROSE MONROE; MIKE KASKEL; SHUTTERSTOCK



ZUMBA CLASS

## STEP IT UP

Our cave-dwelling ancestors painted their walls with pictures of dancers. Even babies instinctively bobble to the beat of music. Dancing feels good, and while

some societies ban it, there is no culture on Earth that doesn't possess an urge to dance. Bounce your way to bliss with a back to basics ballet class, salsa social or Zumba session.

your brain that registers pleasure, and just humming to yourself can brighten your mood. So, tune into your own personal power playlist of energetic hits to lift spirits and musically motivate your way out of apathy. Michael Jolkovski, a psychologist who specializes in musicians, believes that music also reduces stress by helping people connect with others.





THICH NHAT HANH

## FAKE IT 'TIL YOU FEEL IT

You may not feel like it, but just turning a frown upside down actually releases critical hormones that will make you

feel better. "Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy," wrote Thich Nhat Hanh. The wise Buddhist monk was onto something.

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GRATITUDE JOURNAL BY TERRI KAHRS, PRINGLE HILL STUDIO



# 16

## WRITE YOUR WAY WELL

The act of tracing and analyzing your thoughts and emotions across a page (or tapping away at a keyboard) can make you more productive

and emotionally aware, and a less irrational decision maker—all key components of a contented state of mind. Studies at the University of Missouri, Columbia, have shown that writing about achieving future goals

and dreams can make people happier and healthier. Similarly, there's plenty of evidence that keeping a gratitude journal can increase happiness and health by making the good things in life more salient.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PAUL DAVIS/TOUCHING PEACE PHOTOGRAPHY; SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF TERRI KAHRS/PRINGLE HILL STUDIO



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## LIGHTEN UP

An easy way to lighten up a mild case of malaise is to buy a sun lamp. Sit in front of it an hour a day to banish winter blues without having to worry about a litany of potential prescription-induced side effects. People experiencing winter depression typically have low levels of serotonin, the "happiness molecule," and high levels of melatonin. They may be suffering from SAD—Seasonal Affective Disorder. Says neuroscientist and Mercaptor Discoveries CEO Sara Isbell, a lack of sunlight is thought to "affect the balance between serotonin and melatonin, both of which are involved in sleep patterns and mood."

## CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!

Feeling overwhelmed and overloaded after the excess of last year's festivities? Purge purchases from your closet, unsubscribe from unwanted emails and declutter from your computer to streamline and destress. The first quarter of the year is a perfect time to set yourself free from the fetters of too much stuff!



MARIE KONDO, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE-CHANGING MAGIC OF TIDYING UP: THE JAPANESE ART OF DECLUTTERING AND ORGANIZING"

## SLEEP YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS

According to psychology professor Norbert Schwarz, "Making \$60,000 more in annual income has less of an effect on your daily happiness than getting one extra hour of sleep a night." Schwartz should know; he directed a major U of Michigan sleep study. So instead of putting in extra hours of overtime in hopes of impressing your boss and getting that raise you're sure will make you happier, hit the hay a little earlier instead, and reap the psychological rewards of a happier you.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DREW KELLY; KAY MARTINEZ; SHUTTERSTOCK



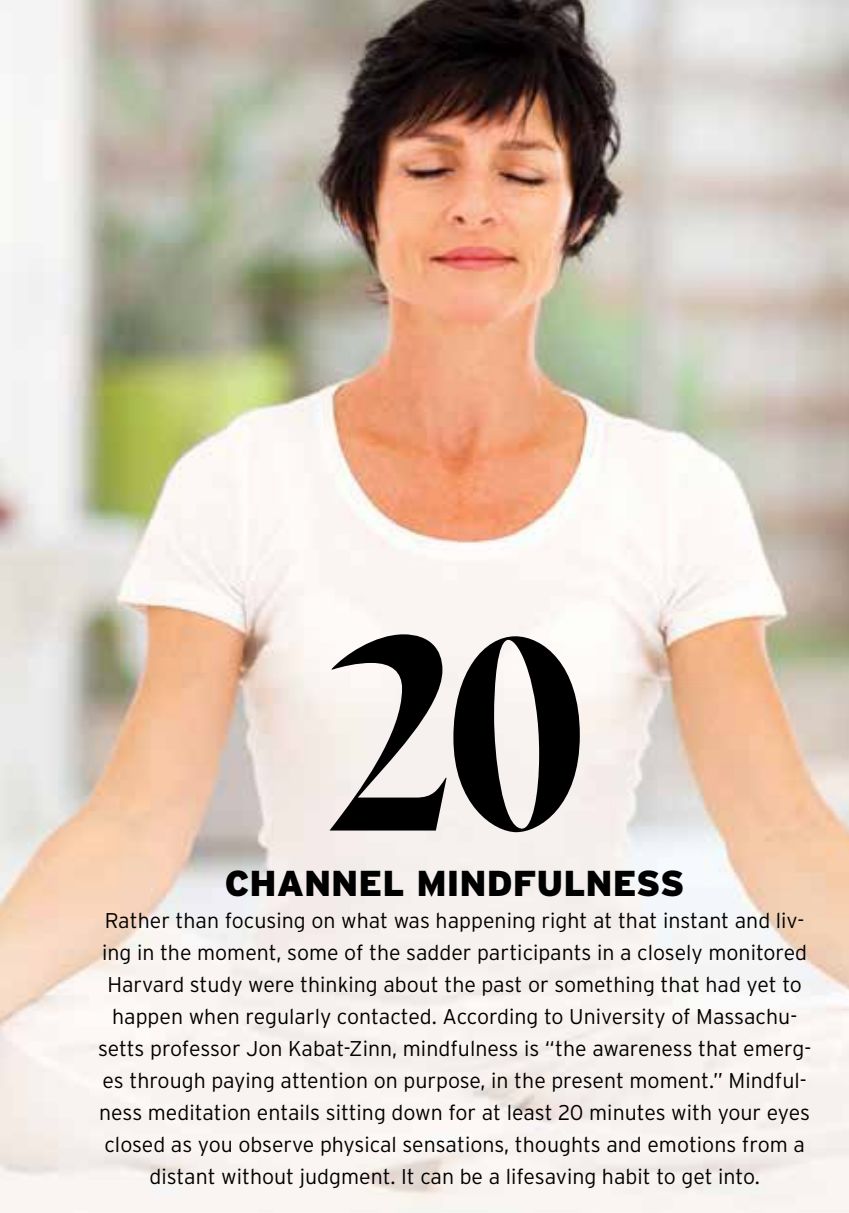
## EMBRACE CREATURE COMFORTS

For folks who shy away from social situations, or even for those of us who relish mingling, there is nothing like the comfort of a pet. Dr. Allen McConnell of Miami University in Ohio has found that social support provided by pets is comparable to that from

a fellow family member. Pet owners tend to have greater self-esteem, are less depressed and less lonely—and they even exercise more, says the good doctor. Walking the dog may seem like a chore, but it actually is an emotionally elevating activity, and let's not forget that squatting down with a pooch-poop bag exercises the quads.

KEEGHAN, THE GOLDEN RETRIEVER





## CHANNEL MINDFULNESS

Rather than focusing on what was happening right at that instant and living in the moment, some of the sadder participants in a closely monitored Harvard study were thinking about the past or something that had yet to happen when regularly contacted. According to University of Massachusetts professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment.” Mindfulness meditation entails sitting down for at least 20 minutes with your eyes closed as you observe physical sensations, thoughts and emotions from a distant without judgment. It can be a lifesaving habit to get into.



VOLUNTEER AT SAN JOSE MUNICIPAL ROSE GARDEN



PALO ALTO ARTIST SANDY OSTRU

## PICTURE IT

Even if your greatest artistic masterpieces are drawings of stick figures, there’s a therapeutic effect to letting it all out onto paper or any other medium.

Channel your inner Jackson Pollock by throwing paint on canvas, and you’ll come away from the experience with more pep in your step and maybe a conversation piece worthy of hanging over the mantelpiece.

# 25

## DISH UP A PLATE OF JOY

Although trendy diets may help you shed weight and honor your commitment to your New Year’s resolution, they may eventually start to negatively affect your mood. Eating healthy food is not only good for your body, it also contributes to your



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## GET PERSONAL

As entertaining as they may be, Facebook posts are no substitute for face-to-face connections. If you’re feeling isolated despite countless daily virtual interactions, consider reaching out and rekindling connections in person. There’s a reason why “the more the merrier” is a tried and true maxim; the simple act of spending time with friends and family has been shown to lift spirits and increase emotional health and reduce the risk of developing dementia.



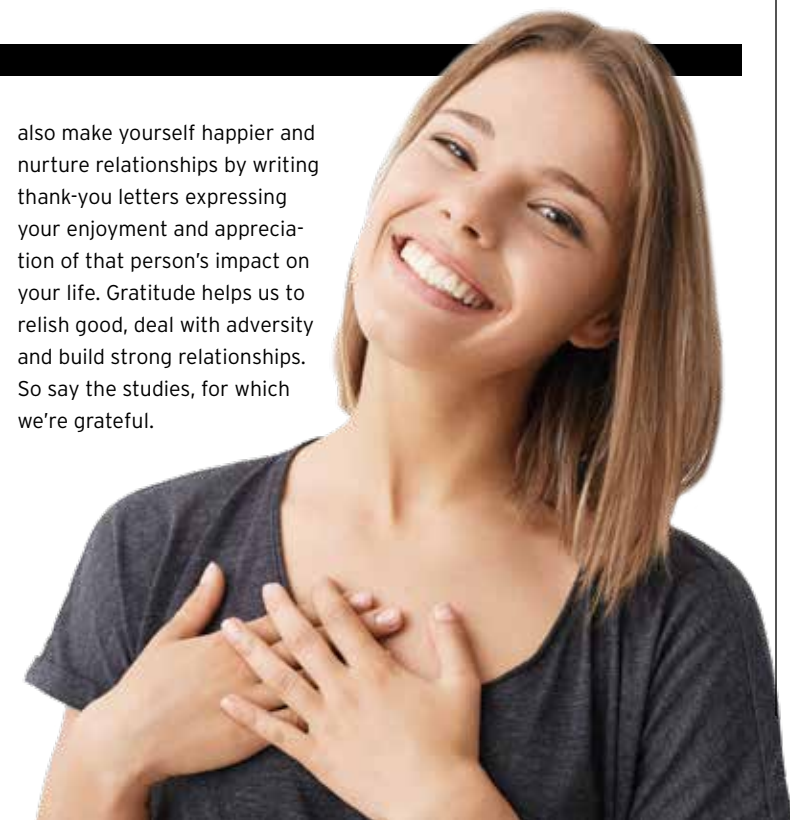
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: GINNY LEBACQZ; SHUTTERSTOCK (2)

# 24

## COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Pick a time every week to sit down, accentuate the positive and write about your blessings, reflecting on what went right and highlighting accomplishments and gifts for which you are thankful. Sometimes it helps to pick a number—such as three to five things—that you will identify each week. You can

also make yourself happier and nurture relationships by writing thank-you letters expressing your enjoyment and appreciation of that person’s impact on your life. Gratitude helps us to relish good, deal with adversity and build strong relationships. So say the studies, for which we’re grateful.



overall sense of well-being. Scientists have found that depressed people often lack fatty acids in their diet. Neuroscientist Sara Isbell explains, “Serotonin is made from the amino acid tryptophan, which is not naturally found in the body but must be obtained from dietary sources.” Good (and delicious) sources include salmon, tuna and walnuts. A well-balanced variety of foods in your diet will most likely lead to a better balance in mood as well. ■