

## The Doc Replies

Our expert answers your medical questions

### What is non-epileptic attack disorder?

Non-epileptic attack disorder (NEAD) is a not uncommon condition and thought to be the reason for up to half of seizures admitted to A&E. While a NEAD seizure may look similar to an epileptic attack, it isn't caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain, as is the case in epilepsy.

Rather, the cause seems to be emotional or mental, and triggered when the brain can't cope with a particular thought, emotion or stressor, often due to previous trauma such as abuse. This leads to real physical symptoms.

It's often not clear what has caused a non-epileptic attack and they can happen to people who have epilepsy, so it can be difficult even for a specialist to diagnose. NEAD seizures, also called functional seizures, happen unconsciously. The person has no control over them and they are not put on. A common misconception is the patient may be acting up for attention.

The most reliable way to diagnose it is by using a video EEG, which records what the patient is doing on video while an EEG test records their brainwaves at the same time. This can show if there's any abnormal brain activity during a seizure. Treatment would be psychological, such as talking therapies and psychotherapy for deeply embedded trauma.

### Why do my legs twitch and feel heavy after doing strenuous activity like gardening?

Generally, the sensation of heavy legs can have multiple causes including poor circulation, varicose veins, blocked arteries and issues in the lower spine.

Leg twitching can be common after exercise so it could be caused by the exertions of gardening. There are also many causes of leg twitching but generally it's not due to anything serious. Physiological myoclonus twitching is quick muscle twitches followed by relaxation, for example your leg twitching just before or during sleep.

Twitching can be caused by lack of sleep, too much caffeine and being dehydrated, which can affect circulation. More rarely, it can be caused by something more serious like nervous system disorder, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy or motor neurone disease. If it's long-term, constant or accompanied by other symptoms you should speak to your GP.

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## BLUE MONDAY NEEDN'T BE THE MUCH-HYPED MOST

# Let's prioritise joy and playfulness, love ourselves enough, make the best choices and allow it in – here's how to achieve it

With Blue Monday looming, Scotland's own "joy expert", Sharon Miller, pictured right, has a toolkit of support to help beat the blues, not only tomorrow, but beyond. The Glasgow wellbeing guru is the founder of Joyworks, an organisation set up to transform workplaces through laughter, therapy and holistic programmes. A Long Covid sufferer, she is preparing tomorrow's Joyworks for Wellness Online Programme, funded by the former Covid Aid charity, now known as Covid Support. Here she shares with P.S. readers her tips for a better tomorrow.

WORDS  
SHARON MILLER

**W**hat does Blue Monday mean to you? If you are of a certain age, you might think of

New Order's popular song, or you might believe that it is just another marketing ploy to get us to buy new products or services.

What many don't know is that Blue Monday is a concept coined by UK psychologist Cliff Arnall in 2005. Developing a pseudo-scientific formula that took in the weather, personal debt level, post-Christmas malaise, failing New Year's resolutions and low motivational levels, he came up with the third Monday in January as a specific day in which we would be compelled to take action but which has become known globally as "the most depressing day of the year".

But Blue Monday can be a day to rejoice the myriad ways in which we can take charge of our own happiness, quashing the commercial hype and most importantly bringing awareness to the impact on our mental health that the onset of the New Year can bring. It's a perfect time to normalise feeling blue rather than buying into the whole "New Year New You" mantra. It's an opportunity to destigmatise these blue feelings, recognising that it is okay not to feel okay and take extra care of each other. Let us celebrate

our courage to feel the difficult emotions, express them and seek help when needed. Let us prioritise joy and playfulness wherever we are. Let this day become an opportunity for even better days!

Here are three science-backed fun tips and exercises for joy, connection, self-compassion and nurturing at home:

- **Adopt a morning mantra.** Place your hand on your heart, breathe deeply, envisioning calming colours pumping your heart with joy. Simple acts like this reduce stress hormones and lower heart rate. Prioritise your positive self-talk before rising. Self-compassion shifts our biochemistry. You can use coloured pens and paper to bring your mantra to life, keeping your creation by your bedside or on your wall to inspire this soothing practice.
- **Think about whose laugh you love the most.** Bring that person to your mind and see the both of you together in your imagination. Where were you when you last laughed? What had just happened? Now, have your image and sound in mind as you go through your day. Imagine your day as a movie and your laughter soundtrack is underscoring it, reminding you that perspective is everything. Visualisation is a powerful tool. I

## DEPRESSING DAY OF THE YEAR



● Music-based activities in the workplace can help 'uplift' colleagues' spirits.

## BANISHING BLUES

### Ways to bring joy and positivity into work

While we can think that feeling blue is something we have to deal with personally at home, most of us are at work for a large part of the day. Our mental health is better when we feel like we matter, belong and are valued. A survey published in the Harvard Business Review by Alex Liu declared that joy arises in team dynamics from a combination of harmony, impact and acknowledgment. Here are three ways to inspire just that. For we love it when our colleagues are making it fun for each other.

- **Joyful Tunes:** Music gets us into feeling good fast, but we can forget that as busy bees at work. Designate a weekly "Joy DJ" who can infuse the workplace with music breaks to uplift spirits and enhance positivity. Music can welcome staff as they come into the building or before an online meeting.
- **Gratitude Wall:** Get creative. Foster appreciation by creating a staff room appreciation wall. Studies link gratitude to happiness, improved health and stronger relationships – even better sleep. It is a fantastic way to support colleagues, especially those facing challenges with positivity.
- **Storytelling Bond:** Storytelling is a creative ancient practice that fosters community spirit and joy, so let us bring it into our workplaces. Choose random office items and pop them in a bag. Each person lifts one out and uses it to inspire a bit of the story, then passes it to the next person in the circle and the next. Take five minutes out of your day for harmonious fun. By embracing these suggestions, you and your teams can forge stronger connections, bolster resilience, and create a positive, joy-filled atmosphere – crucial steps toward banishing the misery of Blue Monday and beyond.

Forget the whole "New year New You" mantra and make your own

had the opportunity to experience its transformational benefits when it helped me heal from serious illness. Give it a go!

- **Make it your mission to move in a way you love.** People sleep significantly better and feel more alert during the day if they get at least 150 minutes of exercise a week. This, we know, is crucial as poor sleep heightens cancer and dementia risks.
- **Laugh.** Did you know that laughing intensely for an hour can burn as many calories as lifting weights for 30 minutes? Make exercise even more fun and have a go at Laughter Yoga this Blue Monday. When I train people in Laughter Yoga, I tell them it's an essential to run a session on this day. Exercises that can get you started include silent laughter, laughing hysterically but without making a sound. Laughter truly is the best medicine and, just like visualisation, our brain doesn't know the difference between real and imagined, so pretend first and watch the tears of joy flow as you go!
- **Join or start your own joy group.** It sounds like a cliché but I hope you'll agree when you hear the science of why it's so good for us. Harvard University's longest piece of research – 85 years and

involving 724 people, found that it wasn't diet, exercise, money or career achievement that brought joy. Its researchers found positive relationships keep us healthier, happier and help us live longer. How to do it: Use a 10-minute timer and paper. Under the word BLUE list what makes you feel down, and under the word PINK what makes you feel grand! Use these insights to craft your perfect group. Is there one local? No? Then start one. It could become your life's purpose and a place you may meet lifelong supportive friends. Joy is not merely an emotion; it is a catalyst for mental well-being. Its psychological impact is profound, activating neural pathways linked to happiness, reducing stress hormones and enhancing overall mental resilience. Embracing joy on this day can counterbalance negative emotions, elevating mood and fostering a sense of hope and positivity.

Incorporating joy into our lives is not just a fleeting pleasure; it is a powerful tool for nurturing mental health, strengthening emotional resilience and navigating challenges with a more positive outlook.

Joy works, so let's love ourselves enough to let others love us, make the best choices and allow it in.