

Mobile apps to elevate people's moods

By Jeanne Nelson

Mobile applications are one of the newest methods available to help elevate your mood. If you have a smart phone or tablet, mobile applications are convenient, entertaining, and inspiring. They don't take a lot of time and are often free of charge.

Here are some of my favorite apps that provide mood-lifting tips and entertainment. All are free to download and available on multiple phone platforms, unless otherwise noted.

Happify. I am hooked on this app. The phone application touts "Happiness. It's Winnable." Happify is a sophisticated, research-based app that assesses your state of mental health and then exercises your brain as a muscle to overcome negative thoughts. The app focuses on positivity with the idea that happiness is a skill you can control and a habit you can develop. The app is free and premium features are available for an additional fee. If you don't have a smart phone, you can also go to my.happify.com.

TZ Mood Tracker. This highly rated app monitors your emotional experience over time. Users rate themselves on six different scales: anxiety, stress, depression, brain injury, post-traumatic stress, and general well-being. Custom scales can also be added. The data gathered can uncover patterns in behavior, and provide helpful information for your health care provider. This app is only available on iOS devices (iPhones and iPads).

Breathe2Relax. Download this app and have an on-the-go tool to cope with stressful situations. Breathe2Relax offers guided breathing exercises to help manage stress, anger, anxiety, and

difficult moods.

GoLantern: Lantern matches users with a one-on-one coach for expert advice. It takes a self-improvement approach to mental health combined with cognitive behavioral therapy. Lantern is primarily web-based and has a subscription fee, but also has a free, supplemental app for iOS devices.

PTSD Coach. Developed by US Department of Veteran Affairs, the PTSD Coach helps military personnel and civilians learn about and manage symptoms of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Optimism. Optimism and FindingOptimism.com offer a family of applications that focus on self-tracking as a tool for coping with depression, bipolar, anxiety and PTSD.

MoodRhythm.com. The hype is building for this app designed to help individuals with bipolar disorder listen to their daily rhythms and maintain balanced, healthy lives. The app actively and passively tracks daily rhythms for the user and provides valuable information back to the primary care provider. This application is currently being tested by Dr. Ellen Frank's research team at the University of Pittsburgh and has not been released.

More apps are available or coming down the pipeline. Search online for "top mobile apps for mental health" for additional results. Psyberguide.org is a helpful website that rates the effectiveness of apps for mental health by condition and treatment method.

Mobile apps are just one useful tool in our mental health toolkit. This technology can help improve mental health and can complement other treatments, but is not meant to replace a mental health professional or traditional treatment methods.

Jeanne Nelson is an instructor and liaison for the South Lake Tahoe Chapter of NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness). For more information about a workshop or support group,

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