



How to Travel Smart

By Kim Knox

Choosing Calm over Chaos

Travel is a word that can invoke veiled images of far away lands, new sights, smells, tastes and sounds; of stolen time rich with untold adventure... or at least that's how travel is often glamorously portrayed in the movies. Could it be your travel experiences, and mine, have sometimes fallen short of the perfection of a Hollywood tale?

The authors at Wikipedia note...

"... the word 'travel' comes from the Middle English word *travailen*, *travelen* (which means to torment, labor, strive, journey) and earlier from Old French *travailler* (which means to work strenuously, toil).

In English we still occasionally use the words *travail* and *travails*, which mean struggle."



So where's the fun in that? Even today, with all of the modern conveniences, travel can still be rough. A 99-year-old woman in a wheelchair might get frisked during a TSA inspection. The Transportation Security Administration alone can cause undue travel stress.

And the uncertainties and challenges do not stop there. Regardless of your experience with travel, it is a different thing entirely when you add on a layer of anxiety-laced bipolar disorder.

My name is Kimberly Knox, a bipolar I patient and your tour guide on this adventure called, 'How to Travel Smart.' From my personal travel experience, and the experience of other bipolar peers, it appears that the principle problems stem from anxiety, fueled in addition by some degree of either depression, mania, or worse still, rapid cycling.

But there's good news. You can take some sensible, rather simple steps to create the best possible travel scenario. And two words say it all: plan ahead.



Preparing to Travel

Best case scenario: You've had bipolar long enough to know the difference between it and you, and you are on medication that controls it reasonably well. If not, you're still fit to travel; you're just juggling a few more balls than someone who has settled into some routine.

Make all of your travel arrangements as far in advance as possible, and in as much detail as possible. This will simplify your trip and keep your mind uncluttered. Print everything out. Make files. Be organized. And remember, travel agents are not yet extinct! For a modest fee, you can team up with an expert to handle your trip details. Book your flights open-ended so that you can make changes to your schedule as you need. And contact your insurance company to find out what you are already covered for and what you may need to buy specifically for your journey. The key here is to avoid the build up of stress, which can fuel anxiety and exacerbate your illness.

Travel with a friend, or hire an escort. Preferred Travel Helpers is just one of many organizations who provide expertly trained staff to accompany you throughout your trip, with varying degrees of expertise to make your trip completely comfortable and worry-free. Though I don't have any personal experience, this firm is fully insured, their website is informative and friendly. Rates vary depending upon your needs.

www.preferredtravelhelpers.com

Travel references: Information services such as TSA (Transportation Security Administration) offer www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/what-know-you-go. Tips for Traveling Abroad is another useful government publication:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html

Get yourself "in shape" for your trip. This important step includes all the things that do a body good -- eating nutritious food, drinking plenty of fluids and getting reasonable amounts of sleep and exercise. Your body and your mind react far better when they are not being asked to perform at the edges of their limits all the time. You're safe—now is the time to gently push yourself.

For every bit of pushing or extending you do in your relaxed pre-trip state, the more resilient you will feel on the road.



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Talk to your doctor and your therapist well in advance of your trip. Share details about the destination, your trip goals, any known challenges and your concerns. For example, if you know you're sensitive to altitude and you're preparing for a hike into the Andes, talk to your doctor about taking Diamox (Acetazolamide). If you're boarding a ship, perhaps you'll need something to prevent motion sickness. Is it advisable to take an aspirin on your long flight? Do you need something to help you sleep? Perhaps ask about melatonin.

In addition, your doctor may prescribe a medication(s)¹ you can take in the event you need some extra help (a PRN, or 'as needed'), and if not, don't be shy: Ask. There are many medications that can be helpful, and your doctor will know which will work best with whatever you are already taking.

Your therapist will be able to arm you with coping strategies to help you deal with challenging situations. The more your therapist knows you and your disorder, the more helpful this kind of pre-planning and support will be.

Time differences and medication. The word from UCSD's Michael McCarthy, MD., PhD in psychiatry, and who has written extensively on the effects of travel and illnesses, take your medications at the same time. 9:00 pm in America, 9:00 pm in Europe. The therapeutic levels really won't be affected, and that includes lithium.

Check and double check that you pack your medications. Not in your suitcase but in your carry-on bag. DO NOT CHECK THEM in case you need them during the flight, experience any travel delays, or heaven forbid your luggage gets lost.

Pack enough for your entire trip... and a little more. If for any reason you have to obtain more, call your doctor's office and ask them to send the order to your local pharmacy abroad. (In other countries, many prescriptions are actually sold over-the-counter, so check that option too). But bottom-line, take what you'll need, plus a "cushion" of a few extra days of medication in case of an emergency.

Focus completely on whatever you are doing at the moment. This is a calming practice called 'mindfulness.' It's both broad and narrow; internal and external. Try to

¹ The term "medication" throughout may also mean "supplement".



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appreciate every movement and component of each activity, even if it's brushing your teeth. Ritualize whatever you do—keep a schedule of even your simplest activities-- and you will enjoy a sense of control. I believe that it is quite impossible to have a panic or anxiety attack if you are completely in the moment. In a nutshell, mindfulness and all its benefits can be accomplished if you stay centered and uncluttered. (This is more than just a travel tip!). Also, as you read through this chapter, do try the EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique), or “Tapping”.

The Ultimate Preparation

Now is the time to get in the habit of tracking your moods, your medication(s), and integrate some meditation or relaxation exercises into your life. This is best done several weeks in advance of your trip, and in fact should be a part of your daily life, but even the day of, and through your adventure, this will help immensely.

Two tools may serve you well. One is a new mobile app called MOOD WATCH that gives you life-changing data in the palm of your hand. You can download the app on your iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch or Android devices for just 99 cents and is available in 11 languages. (visit www.MoodWatchapp.com). Another similar tracking app is the T2Tracker created by the US Department of Defense to help returning soldiers with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress disorder), and it is free. <http://t2health.org/apps/t2-mood-tracker#.UdNd9lOAFZo> The details and instructions for Mood Watch are in the references section.

Tapping

For some additional peace of mind during travel, you might consider trying my “bonus tip.” It's called Tapping or EFT: Energy Freedom Technique². Amazing, deep, effective, fast, and specific information is also available in the reference section.

² Emotional Freedom Techniques, Craig, G (nd). *EFT Manual* (pdf). Retrieved 2013-06-26.



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And finally, one less worry is always a good thing. I recommend you check out MedJet Assist.³

This is about physical safety, and the only thing it has to do with bipolar is this: you will have one less worry. If you or any of your family become seriously sick or injured, for next to nothing, your fears are gone. MedjetAssist.com. They do NOT cover psychiatric illnesses, but they DO cover everything else. Rain or shine, 24/7, all around the globe. If you are hospitalized more than 150 miles away from your home and require continued in-patient care, Medjet will arrange for air-medical transfer to the hospital of your choice in your home country. This is an unbelievable service, and it's real. Place one more worry behind you, whether it's for your family or yourself. The flat-rate membership fees are amazingly affordable both for individual and family plans. This is a MUST HAVE in your travel kit. Look it up: MedjetAssist.com, and use the discount code: TRAVL for an International Bipolar Foundation 2% discount on all fees and products.



MedFlash

MedFlash can be a lifesaving tool for travelers as you never know when you will be incapacitated or injured.

³ As an affiliate with MedJet Assist I was able to secure the 2% discount code.



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MedFlash is the next -generation of PHR (personal health record) and is much more than an electronic filing cabinet. In fact, it's not a PHR at all. It's an Electronic Personal Health and Wellness Manager (ePHM) that delivers a highly personalized and interactive health and wellness experience that puts the member – the customer in control.

MedFlash offers many exciting features:

Portability for on-the-go or emergency access:

This remains a critical component in any PHM system, but unless it's portable, its value is severely limited.

MedFlash offers multiple ways to enter and access the health profile data stored inside the ePHM, including web portals, smart phone applications and an encrypted USB drive along with a 24/7/365 emergency hotline.

In an instant, ePHM's provide paramedics and emergency room staffs with access to the information they need to properly provide care when a traveler is incapacitated or unresponsive. This flexibility also allows MedFlash to easily transport information between their primary care and specialty care physicians.

Internet access:

MedFlash also connects members to a wealth of trusted medical information available from multiple sources along with 24/7 access to clinical/nursing support through our Fone Med Program.

Again, use the ordering code TRAVL for your discount.

Ready to Launch

So your departure date is finally here. You are ready to launch.



We all know airports have the potential to be crowded, noisy places. Your goal is to have a plan. First of all, travel as lightly as you possibly can so your luggage doesn't overwhelm you physically and mentally. Take your time, ask for help and be prepared to tip. There are people in place to assist you.

If you feel unsteady on your feet-- whether from extreme anxiety or any other reason-- do not hesitate to seek assistance. Assistance can be just a matter of using a cane to help with your balance and as a sign to let those around you know that you require some assistance. It is as much for other people as it is for you. Keep in mind, a cane isn't your only option depending on your level of instability. Nearly all airlines offer a wheelchair service, and if you like, you can request it when you make your reservations. Also note that if you do ask for wheelchair assistance you must comply completely with everything you are requested to do. The airline wants things to go well for you and everyone around you.

Airborne

Once you are airborne, there are several things you can do to stay relaxed at 30,000 feet and to reduce the effects of jet lag. This is my own formula, which I've found to be truly effective trip after trip.

- * Let's assume you have read this entire chapter and have implemented the tips wisely. You should be well-rested, nourished and organized. You've packed your meds and some snacks in your carry-on, and a cane if you need it (high anxiety types). You know what to expect-- any stops, plane changes, flight times and the local arrival time at your destination. You are looking forward to your trip!
- * On longer flights, by all means sleep when you're sleepy, but shoot for the longest leg of the flight. Consider the time it'll be when you arrive, because you'll want to adapt to the swing of things as quickly as you can once you're there.



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- * Kudos to you if you're an easy sleeper, but if not, ask your doctor to prescribe a sleep aid. What you want are good REM cycles. Go light on coffee or other caffeine beverages.
- * As some medical research shows, taking one aspirin can help prevent the development of blood clots during long periods of sitting. Ask your doctor whether this is advisable for you.
- * Move your body. Tricky business these days with airline regulations and limited space, but do as much as you can. Visit the restroom! There are in-seat exercises the airlines often have instructions for. Moving is good, especially for your legs.
- * Set your watch to the new local time as soon as you're on your final flight. As funny as this sounds, set your head too. Refer only to the new time zone and completely buy into your new reality.

For a little different approach, David J. Miklowitz, author of *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide* writes on jet lag:

“One way to combat this travel disruption is to gradually adjust your internal time clock to the new place you're going, before you actually leave. So, over the course of a week before you travel to a later time zone, go to bed an hour earlier than usual, then an hour and a half, and then 2 hours earlier, and so forth. By the time you arrive, it may be easier to adjust to the hours of the new time zone. This procedure usually works best if you'll be in the new time zone for more than a few days.”

Jet lag is one of those maladies that has as many cures as hiccoughs, and probably all about as effective.

After You Land

Slowly take in your new world-- the sights, the sounds, the smells. This is the perfect time to practice mindfulness, to be fully in the moment as you explore a different environment. Remember, whatever time it is there is YOUR time. If it's siesta time, go for it, but avoid oversleeping. A nap is a nap!



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Now comes the easier part—enjoying yourself. Keep to the Mood Watch program which will keep you on course—your meds will be correct, you'll stay focused and centered and mindful, enjoying a little grounding meditation as part of your daily rituals... just like brushing your teeth, but a good deal more focused on keeping you able to enjoy yourself!

Let's face it, living with a mood disorder is challenging, but it has no right nor should it have the power to keep us from traveling and exploring our world. Ernest Hemingway said it so beautifully, "It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end."

Enjoy your journey!

Kimberly Knox

Resources:

TSA (Transportation Security Administration): www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/what-know-you-go

Tips for Traveling Abroad: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html

MoodWatchApp.com, available in 11 different languages and endorsed by NAMI (National Alliance for Mental illness) and the International Bipolar Foundation

Instructions on how to use Mood Watch:

MOOD WATCH lets you easily track your moods and biofeedback for a clear picture of how to improve your mental health and overall well-being. Simply respond to the following questions on your iPhone or iPod touch.



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-- Overall, how are you feeling? (Choose from Excellent, Great, Good, Fair Not So Good or Terrible.)

-- How many hours of sleep last night?

-- Quality of sleep? (Choose from Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor)



(Above, a wrist blood-pressure/pulse monitor)



From here, you'll have a little biofeedback exercise, and one that's well worth doing. Your mind has more to do with your body than you might think, and you'll see the proof here.





Any blood pressure monitor will do. For example this wrist monitor is small, inexpensive (under \$20.00), and if you're consistent in the way you use it, it's accurate. Just strap it on and record your pulse and pressure. Remember, be consistent. Keep the monitor at heart-level and avoid talking, laughing or fidgeting and uncross your legs. Now record the numbers in MOOD WATCH. Then, meditate for between 3 and 5 minutes, focusing on your breath... slow deep breath in, longer exhale out. Practice will make meditating easier as you learn to relax and note how you feel better.

Finally, take your pressure and pulse again and record the numbers after meditating. You will likely notice a significant difference. If not, you will likely with practice. (Don't forget to pack your blood pressure cuff!

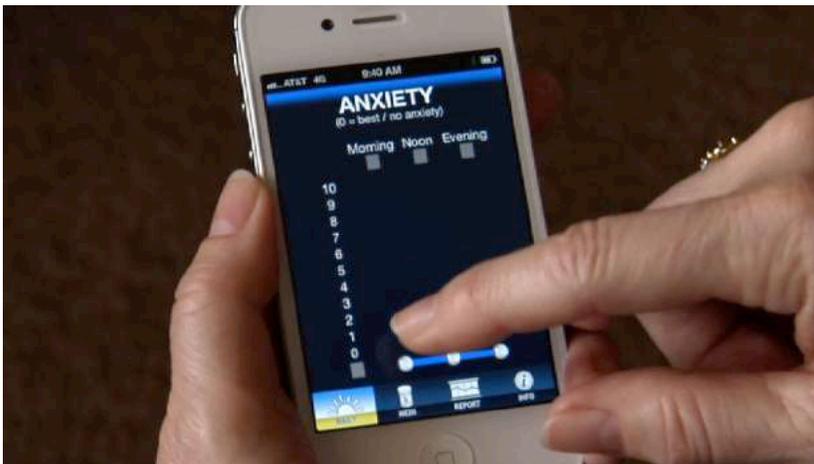
Doing this step regularly will help you lower or stabilize your baseline pulse and pressures so that regardless of your mental state, your body will maintain an even keel. This is biofeedback. It takes practice, but it is both doable and incredibly rewarding. Having the ability to check your vitals will reassure you that things are not nearly as bad as they might feel when anxiety is creeping up. You will quickly learn that you have more control—even subconsciously—over your body than you imagined.

Now, go on to evaluate your mood components guiding the buttons with your finger. You can rate your levels in seconds:





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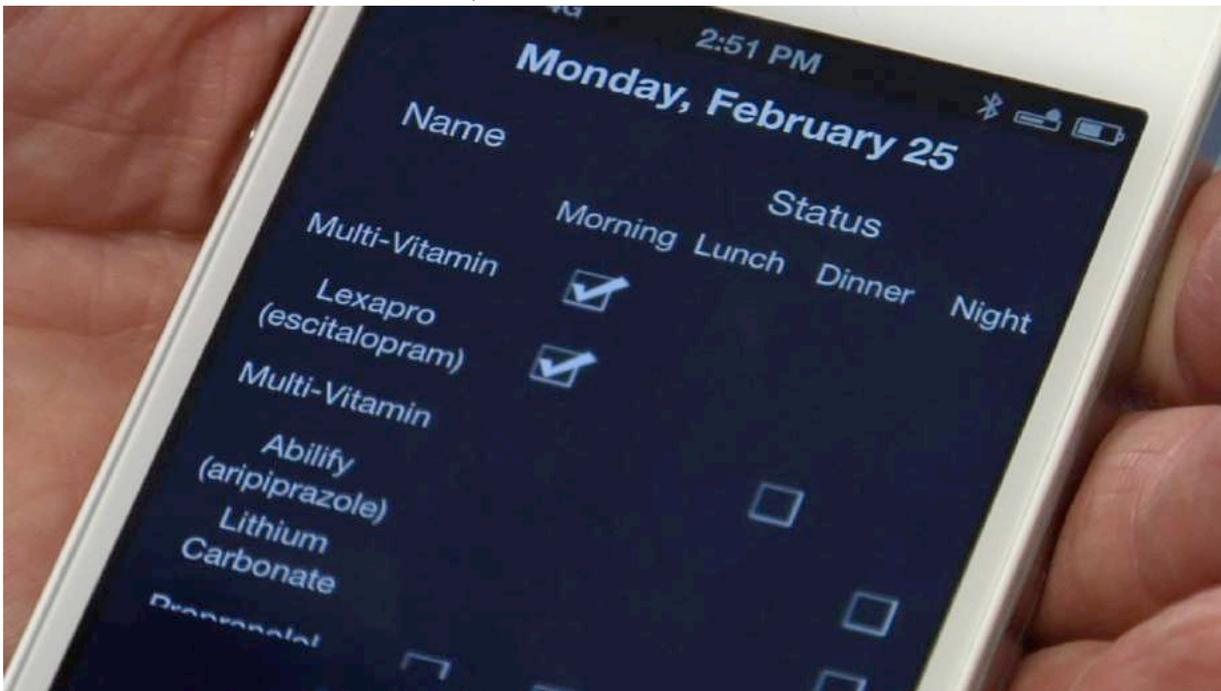


- What is your level of anxiety?
- What is your overall mood? High or low?
- What is your level of calmness? Calm or agitated?
- What is your level of focus or mindfulness? High or low?
- And what is your level of energy? Physical and emotional.



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All of these components can be customized to fit you personally. For example, tap on Energy and change it to Exercise, if you'd prefer to track that component. You can also change the secondary component, or how it's scored. You have a tremendous



amount of flexibility.

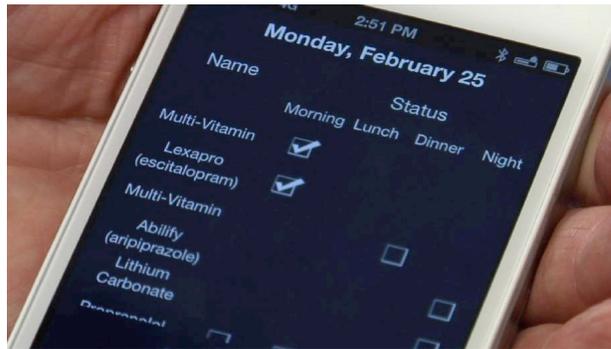
Once you've rated your mood components, there's a space—morning, noon, and evening—to make important notes about how you feel or how your day is going. These turn out to be invaluable later on down the line when looking at all of your information at one time.





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You can also keep quick and easy track of your medications and supplements, the dosages and whether you've taken them. Three of four subtle but effective alarms double to remind you to fill out your chart and take your medications or supplements.



MOOD WATCH takes all of your personal details, compiles and displays them in a

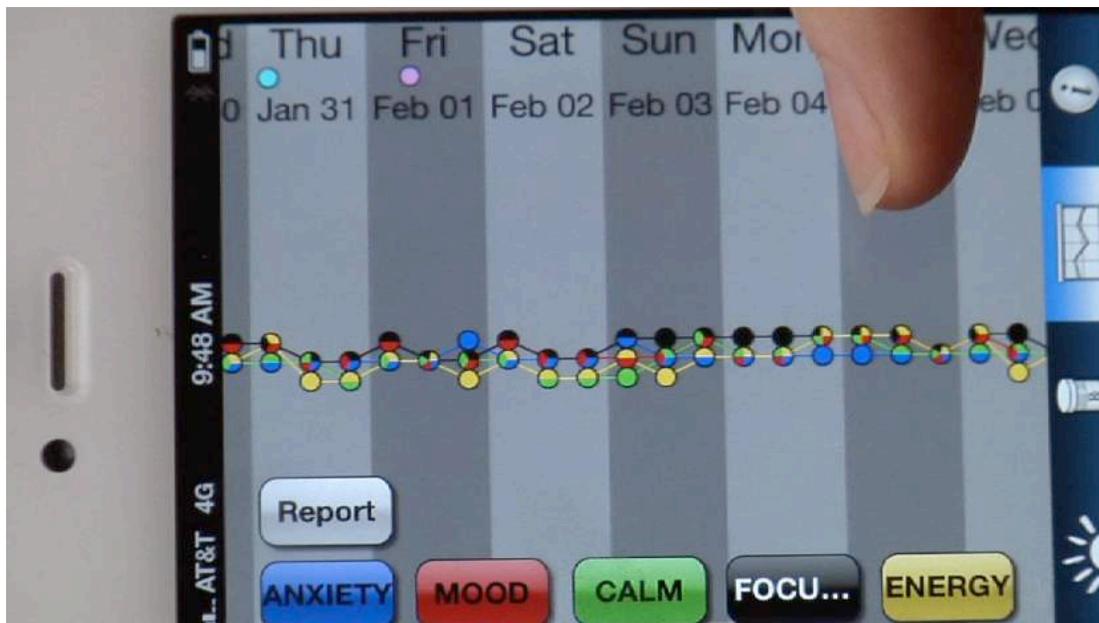
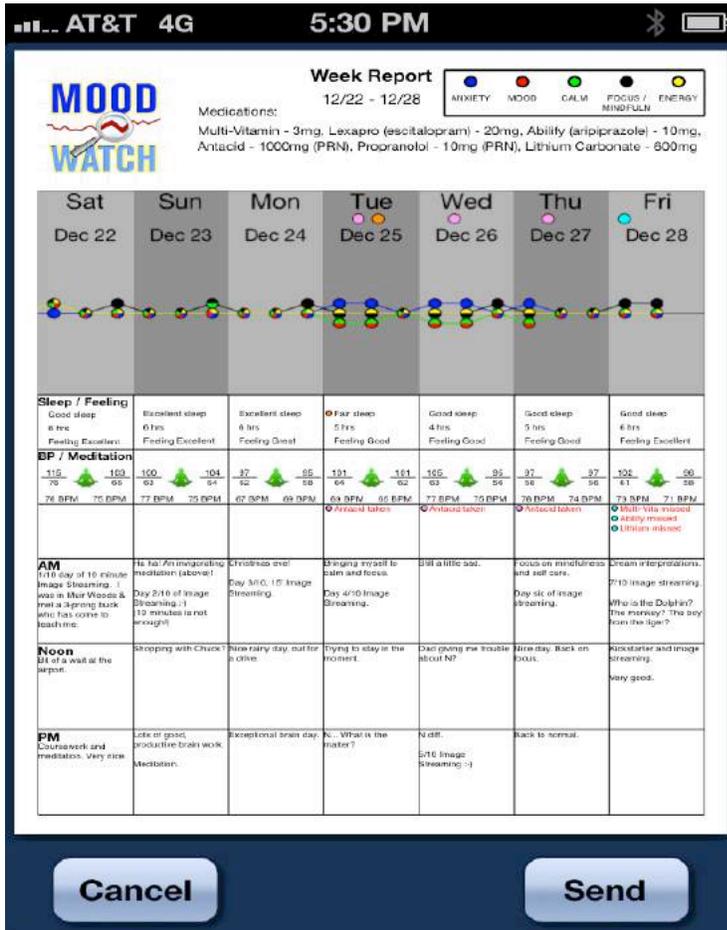


Chart on the app. You get a personal picture of your moods over a week's time.



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The Week Report is even more revealing. It includes your mood chart, and also sleep, blood pressure, meditation, your meds and your notes.



When seen together, the data are amazingly revealing and helpful in figuring out what action you can take to feel better. For example, you may discover that you need to get more sleep... or less sleep. Perhaps you forgot your medication, or are taking too much. And you can see what happens to your vitals and your mood when you meditate.

The Weekly Report can be emailed or printed out on standard-sized paper for easy reference. Consider sharing your data with your doctor. MOOD WATCH can be the window to improved mental health and a happier life.



T2Tracker: <http://t2health.org/apps/t2-mood-tracker#.UdNd9lOAFZo>

MedjetAssist.com

Emotional Freedom Techniques, Craig, G (nd). *EFT Manual* (pdf). Retrieved 2013-06-26

Tapping is a mystery. How it works is a mystery, but it works. Imagine a life free from anxiety, agitation, fear, worry... when you tap, you release these energies and make room for calmness, joy, contentment, mindfulness, and energy. It only takes a few minutes. A MUST TRY!

Let me tell you how I was taught: Standing up or sitting down, doesn't matter, you're just going to be focusing for a few minutes. Get centered (focus inside) and focus on what's getting to you. Could be a pain you want to resolve--physical, emotional, could be generalized anxiety, could be sadness, could be anything, truly.

We're about to start, so think of your problem--let's call it anxiety--and rate your level of anxiety on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the most anxious, one being no anxiety, and don't play the game if you don't have any anxiety. Choose anything else.

Alright, so you're centered, and you have your problem in mind. Take your dominant hand and make gentle karate chops into the palm of your other hand – nothing crazy.

Let's say you're at a seven. Start chopping into your hand and repeat the phrase, "Even though I have this anxiety, I love and accept myself completely." You repeat that phrase 3 to 5 times as you are chopping. (Pick a number and be consistent: 5)

For the next section, take both of your hands to the very crown of your head--the very top. Tap the top of your head with both hands saying, "anxiety". Repeat this word 5 times. That's right, just that word, while you're tapping.

Move to the inside corners of your eyebrows just above your nose. Tap your fingers, two fingers each hand, on the bone at the inside corner of your eyebrows. As you are tapping, continue saying, five times, "anxiety".

Go to the outside corners of your eyes, tapping on the orbit (bone), again saying, "anxiety", 5



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times.

Now follow the orbit edge down to the center of your eyes--just below your eyes. Tap there on the bone again, and as you're tapping, say 5 times, "anxiety".

Now with one hand move your fingers down below your nose and above your upper lip. There, saying 5 times, "anxiety" as you tap.

Next, move your fingers to just below your lower lip, centered, and the top of your chin. Tap there, 5 times, saying, "anxiety".

Okay, homestretch! Both hands at the sides of your neck, slide your fingers down to your collarbone, and down another 2 inches, there on your chest, tap and say, 5 times, "anxiety".

And the final tap: on either side of your body reach one arm around and underneath your arm, tap the side of your body as you say, 5 times, "anxiety". And you're finished!

Now, take a deep breath, relax, and centering yourself again, rate your level of anxiety. I think you'll be astounded to find that your level of anxiety really did go down and you really do feel different.

This technique is so incredibly effective it defies any feeble explanation. Just try it.

Tap away!

Miklowitz, D.J., (2011) *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide*, "OK, Now That I'm Going to Bed on Time, How Do I Fall Asleep?" 175 – 176.

McCarthy, M.J., Welsh, D.K. Cellular Circadian Clocks in Mood Disorders, *J Biol Rhythms* 2012 27: 339 DOI: 10.1177/0748730412456367