



dress SENSE

CAN CLOTHES AFFECT YOUR MOOD?
JO HARTLEY SAYS YES.

When 42-year-old Sydneysider Danielle Armstrong gets dressed in the morning, her outfit is cheerful and bright, even if she is not.

"I have some staples that I fall back on if I am feeling low," she says. "One is a bright orange-and-pink scarf, which always makes me feel better and brings me compliments. Another is a shorter pink floral dress, or my long white vest – good for a more sleek look when layered over black with jeans."

Having suffered for years with depression, Armstrong made it her mission to start dressing in fun, colourful clothes each day and posting her outfits on fashion website Fox In Flats. "It was a way of injecting fun into my everyday dressing, as well as giving me ideas on how to wear clothes differently. I started to post my pictures with the hashtag

#BeatTheBlackDogInStyle, because I realised that putting together an outfit made me feel good about myself. It became an important recovery tool."

Several studies show our mood can be affected depending on what we wear. Likewise, how we feel upon waking can affect our choice of outfit and the day's subsequent moods.

A 2012 University of Hertfordshire study by Professor Karen Pine found that 57 per cent of women admitted to wearing a baggy top when depressed, compared to 2 per cent wearing one when happy. Similarly, 62 per cent put on a favourite dress when happy, compared to 6 per cent when sad.

And the outfit of clothing women most turn to when they are feeling down? Jeans, with more than half of the 100 women interviewed turning to their trusty denims on a blue day.

Research by University of Queensland senior marketing lecturer Dr Alastair Tombs backs up the strong link between women's emotions and their clothes. "By interviewing 30 women, we have found that outfit choices are made to match mood and as a form of self-expression, but we've also found clothing is used to control or mask emotions," he says.

He's also discovered that memories or emotions attached to our clothes can evoke good or bad feelings when we wear them. "If someone is complimented on their clothing, then the good feelings they experience often come back when they wear that again. Conversely, many women said they could never wear the same clothes again if something negative happened in them, such as breaking up with a boyfriend or losing their job."

Personal stylist Annalisa Armitage says it's important to let go of clothes we associate with bad times or feelings. "When women open their wardrobes and have clothing they don't like, clothing that doesn't fit them, or that their husband hates, it's negativity hitting them in the face immediately," she says.

This is also the case when it comes to our clothes size. "Women's bodies change much more frequently than men, so most women have a 'smaller' and 'larger' wardrobe," explains Armitage. "When they are not in the 'small' sizes, it impacts their mood significantly."

Armitage says women should focus on shopping for outfits that emphasise the body parts they love. "Everyone has at least one part that is fantastic, so recognising that will make you feel more confident when you dress," she says.

CREATING A "HAPPY" WARDROBE

- Wear clothes that fit beautifully and feel physically good, such as cotton, cashmere or wool-silk blends.
- Remove things from your wardrobe with negative associations.
- Donate clothes that no longer fit – let someone else enjoy them.
- Try to avoid item shopping. Instead, focus on outfit shopping so you have clothes that co-ordinate.
- Cull your wardrobe twice annually – once per season.
- Don't buy clothing that is out of your comfort zone; you probably won't wear it or will feel self-conscious if you do.
- Use "hero" pieces to make an outfit shine. This can be a necklace, special top, pair of pants or even heels.
- Learn which colours and cuts flatter you.
- Emphasise your assets and deflect attention from the features you dislike.

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