

# Must You Feel Like It to Do It?

By

Larry F. Waldman, Ph.D., ABPP

A parent tells their young child to brush their teeth. The child responds, “I don’t want to; I don’t feel like it.”

It is perfectly normal for children to believe that they must be in a certain mood state (feel like it) to do something. Most parents, though, tell their child that they are sorry that they don’t feel like brushing their teeth but go and do it anyway.

This child-like thinking continues for many adults. Unfortunately, as adults we often don’t have someone making us do it anyway.

I recommend exercise as a great natural way to combat depression and/or anxiety. Numerous clinical studies have demonstrated the mental (as well as the physical) value of exercise. When I ask my patients how their exercise programs are going, all too often they tell me they have not gone to the gym at all or not as often as recommended. When I question why that is, I almost always hear, “Because I didn’t feel like it.”

Clearly, many of my depressed patients are operating under the notion they must feel like exercising before they can. One of my patients recently chided me: “Dr. Waldman, you don’t seem to understand. I’m depressed. When I feel better, I’ll go to the gym.” I responded: “I’m sorry; you’ve got it backwards. When you start going to the gym, you’ll feel better.” People who wait to feel like working out before they do, don’t work out too often.

A cornerstone of behavioral psychology is: “It is far easier to behave your way into a new feeling than feel your way into a new behavior. Some mornings I don’t particularly feel like going to the gym, but I go anyway. Five minutes on the stationary bike and I’m glad I came. Push the proper behavior and the feeling soon follows.

Larry F. Waldman, Ph.D., ABPP is a licensed psychologist who has practiced in the Paradise Valley area of Phoenix for over 35 years. He works with children, adolescents, parents, adults, and couples. He also provides forensic consultations in the areas of family law, personal injury, and estate planning. He speaks professionally to laypersons, educators, corporations, and fellow mental health professionals. He teaches graduate courses for the Educational Psychology Department for Northern Arizona University. He is the author of “Who’s Raising Whom? A Parent’s Guide to Effective Child Discipline;” “Coping with Your Adolescent;” “How Come I Love Him But Can’t Live with Him? Making Your Marriage Work Better;” “The Graduate Course You Never Had: How to Develop, Manage, Market a Flourishing Private Practice—With and Without Managed Care;” and “Too Busy Earning a Living to Make Your Fortune? Discover the Psychology of Achieving Your Life Goals.” His contact information is: 602-996-8619; 11020 N. Tatum Blvd., Bldg. E, Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85028; email: [LarryWaldmanPhD@cox.net](mailto:LarryWaldmanPhD@cox.net); website: [TopPhoenixPsychologist.com](http://TopPhoenixPsychologist.com).

