



# Moody Bitches: The Truth About the Drugs You're Taking, the Sleep You're Missing, the Sex You're Not Having, and What's Really Making You Crazy

By Julie Holland

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**A groundbreaking guide for women of all ages that shows their natural moodiness is a strength, not a weakness**

As women, we learn from an early age that our moods are a problem, an annoyance to be stuffed away. But our bodies are wiser than we imagine. Moods are a finely tuned feedback system that allows us to be more empathic, intuitive, and aware of our own capabilities. If we deny our emotionality, we deny the breadth of our talents.

Yet millions of American women are medicating away their emotions with psychiatric drugs whose effects are more far-reaching than most of us realize. And even if we don't pop a pill, women everywhere are numbing their emotions with food, alcohol, and a host of addictive behaviors that deny the wisdom of our bodies and keep us from addressing the real issues we face.

Psychiatrist Julie Holland knows there is a better way. In *Moody Bitches*, she shares insider information about the drugs we're being offered and the direct link between food and mood, and she offers practical advice on sex, exercise, and sleep strategies, as well as some surprisingly effective natural therapies. In the tradition of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, this groundbreaking guide will forge a much needed new path in women's health—and offer women invaluable information on how to live better, and be more balanced, at every stage of life.

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## **Editorial Review**

Review

### **Library Journal:**

"In a frank style—think good friend who's a doctor—Holland examines how prescription drugs work in relation to the stages of women's lives. This guidance is aligned with recommendations for healthy diet and exercise practices that naturally equalize the body's systems."

### **Christiane Northrup, M.D., author of *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*:**

"Feeling moody or bitchy doesn't mean you have a substandard brain or a psychiatric-medication-du-jour deficiency. In her groundbreaking new book, psychiatrist Dr. Julie Holland tells you exactly how to work with your unique brain and body chemistry and embrace and upgrade all of your feelings."

### **Laura Corio, M.D., author of *The Change Before the Change*:**

"Not just informative, Moody Bitches is funny and provocative. An important guide to health and well-being for women of all ages."

### **Douglas Rushkoff, author of *Present Shock*:**

"This is the most important book on being a woman since *Our Bodies, Our Selves*. Scientific yet compassionate, Dr. Julie Holland provides actionable, state-of-the-art advice on how women can navigate through an ever-changing hormonal landscape. She not only gives women new command over their bodies, but also shows how extreme moods and emotions might better be listened to than chemically suppressed."

### **Gabor Maté, M.D., author of *When the Body Says No*:**

"Dr. Julie Holland gives us a deftly written, deeply insightful exploration of women's hormonal fluctuations, sensitivities, and mind states not as pathology to be medicated but as an expression of their true selves. Moody Bitches is both engrossing theory and a practical guide enabling women to remain natural in an unnatural world."

### **Cacilda Jetha, M.D., and Christopher Ryan, Ph.D., coauthors of *Sex at Dawn*:**

"This book should be read by moody bitches everywhere and the befuddled bastards who love them. Dr. Julie Holland has distilled decade of clinical and personal experience into a radically commonsense approach to the fluctuations of femininity."

### **Joshua Wolf Shenk, author of *Power of Two*:**

"Myself, I'm a moody bastard, but I've learned a ton from this brisk, provocative, and instructive book. Dr. Julie Holland writes with the authority of a clinician, the warmth of a good friend, and the urgency of someone who really cares."

### **Andrew Weil, M.D., author of *Spontaneous Happiness*:**

"Finally, an evidence-based guide to health for women, by a woman, that speaks to the mind, body, and spirit of womanhood. An invaluable manual for moody bitches and essential reading for anyone who knows one."

## About the Author

**Dr. Julie Holland** has had a private psychiatric practice in Manhattan for twenty years. Her nationally bestselling memoir, *Weekends at Bellevue*, was based on her nine years running the psychiatric emergency room of America's oldest public hospital. Dr. Holland is an expert on drugs and the brain and appears regularly on the *Today* show and CNN. She lives in New York's Harlem Valley with her husband and two children.

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Women today are overworked and exhausted. We are anxious and frazzled, yet depressed and burned out. Our moods and libidos are at a rock-bottom low, our vital energies drained as we struggle to keep up with work, family, and hundreds of “friends” online. We blame ourselves for how bad we feel, thinking we should be able to handle it all. We dream of being perfect; we even try to make it look effortless, but we were never meant to be so static. We are designed by nature to be dynamic, cyclical, and, yes, moody. We are moody bitches, and that is a strength—not a weakness.

We evolved that way for good reasons; our hormonal oscillations are the basis for a sensitivity that allows us to be responsive to our environment. Our dynamism imparts flexibility and adaptability. Being fixed and rigid does not lend itself to survival. In nature, you adapt or you die. There is tremendous wisdom and peace available to us if we learn how our brains and bodies are supposed to work. Moodiness—being sensitive, caring deeply, and occasionally being acutely dissatisfied—is our natural source of power.

Yet we have been told just the opposite. From a young age, we are taught that moodiness, and all that comes with it, is a bad thing. We learn to apologize for our tears, to suppress our anger, and to fear being called hysterical. Over the course of women’s lives, the stresses and expectations of the modern world interfere with our health and hormones in ways big and small, and the result is the malaise so many women feel. There simply is a better way.

*Moody Bitches* opens the playbook on how we can take hold of our moods and, in so doing, take hold of our lives. By integrating timeless wisdom with today’s science, we can master our moods. If we can understand our own bodies, our naturally cycling hormones, and how modern medicines derange our exquisitely calibrated machines, then we can make informed choices about how to live better.

Women’s hormones are constantly in flux. They ebb and flow over a month-long cycle and they wax and wane throughout decades of fertility, vacillating with particular volatility during adolescence and perimenopause, the spring and autumn of the reproductive years. Compare this to men’s stable hormone levels throughout most of their lives. Our hormonal variations allow us to be empathic and intuitive—to our environment, to our children’s needs, and to our partners’ intentions. Women’s emotionality is normal. It is a sign of health, not disease, and it is our single biggest asset. Yet one in four American women are choosing to medicate away their emotionality with psychiatric medications, and the effects are more far-reaching than most women realize.

Whether it’s food, alcohol, drugs, cell phones, or shopping, we all rely on something in order to numb ourselves during difficult times. Whatever the chosen substance, it offers a welcome promise: that things will be different and better once it is consumed. But you can never get enough of something that almost works, and because our solutions are usually synthetic, not natural, we come up short. We are uncomfortable in our own skin, with our own desires; we are not at ease in our homes and offices, in our roles as parents or caretakers of our parents. Plowing forward, we think we can outrun the angst if we just stay “insanely busy.”

In my psychiatric practice, my patients, like most women, are starved for information about the drugs they’re

taking and how they can change how they're feeling. Moody Bitches is an answer to both problems. I name names (which medicines I love, and the ones I avoid) and discuss the real side effects I've observed—weight gain, libido loss, becoming blasé—and what you can do about them. I share straight talk about enhancing your sex life, the direct link between food and mood, sticking to exercise or sleep schedules, and perhaps the most important piece: tuning in to your body to realign with your natural, primal self.

When I started my practice twenty years ago, women came to me confused by their symptoms and unsure of what to do. They complained of difficulty getting back to sleep or agitation or tearfulness, but they didn't quite know what was wrong. I helped them put a name to their symptoms and explained that there were medicines that could help. I needed to do more teaching about drug therapy back then, and a lot more hand-holding. I would set aside the last ten or fifteen minutes of the hour-long initial consultation in order to quell the fears of people who were wary of taking something that would alter their brain chemistry.

These days, new patients come to me sure that they need medicine for their nerves or their moods, like most of the other women they know. They want me only to help them figure out which one. The confusion used to be: "I can't understand why I keep waking up at four in the morning"; "It's so hard to get out of bed and I don't really care about anything"; "I'm angry all the time, and I don't know why." But over the years, the conversation has morphed, so that now it usually begins with something like this: "Can you tell me the difference between Wellbutrin and Effexor?"; "I can't figure out if I have ADD or OCD"; "Do you know that ad with the woman riding the horse on the beach?"; "Is that new butterfly sleeping pill better than Ambien?" And the one I hear more than you can imagine from my established patients: "Is there anything new I can try?"

The drug companies started direct-to-consumer advertising in the 1980s. Soon after I started my private practice in the mid-1990s, it became less heavily regulated. Ads started springing up on television and in magazines, trumpeting the latest antidepressants and sleeping pills. I went along for the ride as America's use of all prescription psychiatric medications tripled during the nineties, as a direct result of this powerful marketing. By 2006 the antidepressant Zoloft had made more money than Tide detergent, and it became clear to me that something new was happening. Drug companies are spending billions of dollars to turn normal human experiences like fear or sadness into medical diseases. They aren't developing cures; they're creating customers. The problem is not our emotionality; the problem is that we are being persuaded to medicate it away.

The latest news is particularly terrifying. Abilify, a medicine originally formulated to treat people with schizophrenia, expanded into the depression market and is now our nation's top-selling medication, and not just of psych meds. America's number one moneymaking medicine is an antipsychotic. As a psychiatrist, I must tell you, this is insane. There is an ancient Greek word, pharmakon, which held disparate meanings—sacrament, medicine, and poison. It is a common saying in medicine that sometimes the treatment is worse than the disease. There are many medications (chemotherapy is a good example) that are helpful or curative at lower doses but dangerously toxic in higher amounts. It is also true that there are powerful medicines that are appropriately used for one diagnosis but are complete overkill for another. Prescribing antipsychotics to treat depression seems particularly out of balance, especially given the risks of irreversible side effects like diabetes or movement disorders inherent in this class of medicine.

We represent 5 percent of the global population, yet we take 50 percent of the world's pills. (We also take 80 percent of the world's painkillers.) Meanwhile, the percentage of people labeled with psychiatric diagnoses is continually growing. Is it possible there really is an epidemic of mental illness and disability happening in our lifetime, or are physicians too quick to reach for their prescription pads instead of offering harder solutions to their patients' complaints? Medical journals are full of only one kind of ad: pages of information

on the newest drugs and exactly how to prescribe them. Four out of five prescriptions for antidepressants are not even written by psychiatrists but rather by general practitioners, and more often than not they're prescribed for patients without an actual diagnosis of depression. Particularly troubling: surveys of primary care doctors show they routinely overestimate what the antidepressants can do. They've been hoodwinked by the ads, like the rest of America.

Just as offering your toddler the choice between the red dress and the blue dress moves the conversation forward, beyond "you need to wear a dress," the barrage of antidepressant advertising advances the question from Should I take an antidepressant? to Which one should I take? Don't let pharma-con change the way you manage your moodiness. I'm here to tell you that there are healthier ways to treat depression, anxiety, and irritability that don't include pills.

It is not solely the right cocktail of neurotransmitters that dictates mood; more than anything, it is how we live our lives. We can improve how we feel by changing behaviors around food, sex, exercise, addictions, and work/family balance. The problem with taking your happy pills and putting along as before is that it's no better than sweeping dirt under the carpet. I want you to take that rug out back and beat the hell out of it.

But this is not drudgery. It begins with awareness, with the natural process of reconnecting with yourself and your body. Understanding the meaning and utility of your moods is empowering. Reclaiming your authentic, natural self is liberating. It is wholesome and it is healing. Not just for you, but also for your partner, your family, and your community.

This book begins with information about our complex inner workings, revealing the science behind why, as caregivers and nurturers, women have evolved to think and feel differently from men. I explain the wisdom of feeling deeply, and the dangers of cutting ourselves off from that depth. I look closely at why the twenty-eight-day cycle brings on tears and insatiable hunger (and what you can do about it), and how oral contraceptives and antidepressants can disrupt natural phases of desire and connection, potentially leading you to choose "Mr. Wrong," or even to opt out of any mate choice entirely.

The second section delves into relationships and family, with a particular focus on how women's moods mirror critical transition points in our lives. From menarche (the very first menstrual cycle) to mating, from motherhood to menopause, our ever-fluctuating hormones not only dictate but also respond to our behaviors. Testosterone may make you horny to go out and find a guy, but, more likely, seeing a hot new guy will make your testosterone levels rise. We tend to think of love and sex as distinct, but falling head over heels is a physical experience as powerful as any mind-altering drug, and orgasmic sex can trigger hormones that change how attached you are to your partner, complicating your casual hookups. The early stages of a relationship are difficult enough to navigate, but long-term commitment poses its own complications. Moody Bitches tells the truth about monogamy and desire, and why it is that your SSRI (antidepressants like Paxil or Zoloft) is likely not doing you any favors in the bedroom. I also explain the physical and emotional consequences of pregnancy and child rearing; becoming a mother changes not just your body but your brain.

Change is the constant in women's lives, and never more so than in perimenopause, the transitional period before fertility ends that recalls the turmoil of pubescence. Moody Bitches unpacks the biology behind the "cougar" stereotype, describes the herbs and supplements that can combat hot flashes, and paves the way for the peace and freedom that await on the other side.

The third section, the Moody Bitches Survival Guide, is an instruction manual for well-being at any age. We begin with a comprehensive introduction to inflammation, the basis of nearly every medical disease, including depression. Stress and inflammation are inextricably linked, and the key to combating both lies in a

system you've probably never heard of, the endocannabinoid system. When stress nearly knocks you overboard, your internal cannabinoid system helps to right the ship. Even if you've never smoked a joint, your brain and body use cannabislike molecules to make you resilient to stress, similar to the way your endorphin system provides you with natural pain relief. These cannabinoids tamp down inflammation and reactivity in the body, maintaining metabolism, immune functioning, learning, and growing. The endocannabinoid system is mentioned throughout *Moody Bitches*, because it is involved in nearly everything we do, like eating, sleeping, exercising, having sex, giving birth, and nursing.

The practices detailed in the survival guide are critical tools for establishing and preserving mental and physical health; they are designed to reduce stress and inflammation and augment the body's own spectacular capacity for producing pleasure. You'll learn about natural nutrition, so you can stop dieting and start eating for health, and normal sleep, so you can prioritize the hours your body needs. In fact, better sleep, nutrition, and regular cardio in the sunshine may just replace your SSRI. The survival guide also includes practical advice on sex that actually works and addresses the main obstacles women face in reaching orgasm. Getting into and enjoying your body, whether through sex, exercise, or that dreaded word mindfulness, will help you achieve the balance and harmony we're all clamoring for. *Moody Bitches* is a rallying cry for a new way of living. Our lives are out of sync with nature. I fear that the further away we get from what's natural for us, the sicker we're going to get. Our disconnection is our pathology. We need to get back in tune with our bodies and with the natural world around us. In our digital distraction we've lost a basic truth: fresh air, sunlight, and movement make us feel better. Daily cycles of light and dark will do more for our sleep than any pill, being sedentary is our biggest health hazard, and we miss a lot when our relationships become virtual.

*Moody Bitches* is grounded in research and informed by my experiences in working with my patients. Health begins with understanding, and my aim is to demystify women's inner lives to enable change. I'm speaking as a psychiatrist, a wife, and a working mother of two children; the prescriptions I share here are what have worked for me, and for my patients.

Our bodies are wiser than we ever imagined, and so much of what plagues them is interrelated. Overmedication has robbed us of our sense of control, and modern life has separated us from the restorative rhythms of nature. It is understandable to respond to the man-made madness of this world with tears and frustration; those feelings of distress are a pathway toward health and wholeness. We need to tune in to our discomfort, not turn it down. Being sensitive, being irritated, and being vocal about our needs and frustrations will improve our lives.

Once we begin to listen to our bodies and align with our moodiness, we can take action. That action might be to try a natural remedy when you had relied on a prescription. It might be to reappraise all that you ask of yourself in your many roles as a woman. The answer for each of us will be unique. But all of us need to stop and listen when we get bitchy. Embracing our moods will, in the end, make us happier.

We need to begin anew, to realign with our bodies and learn how to treat them right. It's time to embody the wisdom inherent in nature, and in our natural animal selves. *Moody Bitches* will show you the way, giving you the tools you need to take care of yourself.

## Users Review

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**James Lindberg:**

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