

Recording your ups and downs

Today you have a happy, healthy and lazy day

If you feel like it, you can keep an online record of your eating, smoking or drinking habits. You can also record your mood.

You get up, brush your teeth, get dressed and have a piece of toast. Then you go online and fill in how long ago you smoked your last cigarette, make a note of how many hours of sleep you have had, establish how many calories that piece of toast has, check your state of mind.

Are you up for life today? Determined? Irritated? Twenty clicks and you know where you're at. Thousands of people keep tabs on their mood every day on Moodscope; the results appear in the shape of a neat graph on your screen so you can see on which day you were up and on which day you were down.

The site scores you between 0 (unhappy) and 100 (happy). It is meant for those who suffer from mood swings and would like to get some insight into themselves. 'It works' says founder Jon Cousins (54). 'Just like it helps to keep an eye on your money if you want to save, or to keep an eye on your alcohol intake if you want to cut down. You gain insight about the way you function and can then pay attention to it. Members of Weight Watchers keep an eye on their weight and share the outcome with others. There is proof that this helps people to lose weight. So why wouldn't it work for your state of mind?'

Three years ago the English Cousins, owner of an advertising agency, wasn't doing well at all. He was depressed and turned out to be suffering from bipolar disorder. A psychiatrist told him to record his moods and all his ups and downs. 'There are tests to do that, but there was no site. So I started one.' Every day he figured out what his state of mind was with the help of twenty digital playing cards; he then sent the results to a friend. An article in The Times about his invention sparked a lot of interest. Nowadays, the investors queue at the door and users of the site take along printouts to their doctors.

Moodscope is the last in a long row of sites and apps which enable you to record your behaviour and empower yourself. Millions of people keep tabs on their calorie intake, eating habits and weight. Former smokers can see on a daily basis how many days they have been without a smoke and how much money this has saved them. People who have trouble sleeping can record the hours they have slept and combine those with data on alcohol intake, eating or stress. Women who want to become pregnant, or who want to avoid pregnancy, can visit dozens of hormonal cycle sites on which they can see every day whether they are ovulating or not and where they can list complaints such as cramps and PMS.

There are some affirmative American sites on which you can state your goal in life and then record every day whether and how you have come closer to that goal. People who are into running can write down where they run, how fast and how often. There is also the possibility of sharing your results with others; this can be encouraging.

The results of Moodscope can also be shared. Jon: 'Fifty percent of our members send their results to friends. That is helpful, because it gives you the feeling that someone is keeping an eye on you without bothering them with your problems.'

Many online tracking tools receive sponsorship and show ads on their sites. Moodscope doesn't do that, but they will not be able to go on this way for much longer. 'The site is a fulltime job for me', says Jon. 'and that does not bother me. But we grow by twenty members a day and we will have to ask for some kind of contribution.' He has not yet worked out how exactly he will do this, because he wants the site to remain accessible for everyone. 'One thing is certain, I will continue working on it every day. My own state of mind has improved immensely ever since I started the site. Sometimes the internet is seen as a lonely place, but in this way it is just a fantastic tool.'