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The Best Excuse for Hitting the Mall

Find out why grabbing a shopping cart when you're in a bad mood may not be such a bad idea

Posted on April 11, 2013 by Alison Goldman, Women's Health Assistant Online Editor

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You just had a brutal day at work. What's your move? According to a survey conducted on behalf of Ebates.com, 51.8 percent of Americans say they sometimes go shopping when they need a pick-me-up.

The survey asked 1,000 Americans aged 18 and older about their shopping habits. Not surprisingly, more women are getting their retail therapy on than men: When you break the above stat down by gender, 63.9 percent of women say they shop to increase their happiness, compared to 39.8 percent of

men. The top item women spring for? Clothes. Plus, 39.2 percent of women believe that retail therapy really *does* provide a mood boost (20.6 percent of men feel the same way).

Fun fact: They might be right. In a recent experiment conducted at the University of Michigan, 100 participants watched a sad movie clip. They were then randomly assigned to either a "Choosing" or "Browsing" group and presented with 12 items (such as slippers and headphones). The "Choosers" were told to pick four items (all priced at \$25) that they'd hypothetically like to buy, and then drag them into a box labeled "Your Shopping Cart." The "Browsers" were told to judge which four items would be most useful when traveling, and then drag those into a box labeled "Travel Items." The participants then rated their emotions again—and the "Choosers" were much less sad than the "Browsers."

The idea, says lead researcher and assistant professor of marketing Scott Rick, PhD, is that making buying decisions helps you reclaim some sense of control when you're upset—and that minimizes sadness.

So, as it turns out, retail therapy *can* be a useful (and fun!) tool every once in a while. Just don't go crazy since you're probably not in the most rational state of mind when you do it. "I would definitely hold off on the big-ticket purchases until you're in a more neutral, deliberate, cool-headed state," says Rick. But that super-cute blouse you'd most likely grab anyway? Go for it!