

Actions Likely to Lead to Happiness and Wellbeing

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There is a growing body of research on happiness and human flourishing. The table below lists activities that have been shown to increase feelings of vitality and joy, in some people, some of the time. It is important to note that although these behaviours are helpful for many people in many situations, they don't work for everyone all of the time. So choose activities that resonate with you, try them out and notice the results.

Also, be aware that chasing happiness seems to be a bad idea. It is perfectly reasonable to want to be happy... and, if you make happiness a goal then it actually becomes harder to be happy. Goals around vitality and valued-living seem to be healthier.

Behaviour	Specific activities to try
<p>Mindfulness: <i>'Paying attention with openness, curiosity and flexibility'</i> <i>Russ Harris</i></p>	<p>Regular mindfulness meditation - you can download a free MP3 here: UCLA http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22</p>
	<p>Mindfulness in everyday life - bring your attention with openness and curiosity to whatever you are doing at that moment (washing the dishes, eating lunch, waking up and down stairs, listening to a loved one tell you about their day...).</p>
	<p>Mindfulness of your thoughts and feelings. Notice what you are thinking and feeling in this moment now with openness and curiosity.</p>
	<p>Mindfulness of your behaviour - check in regularly, am I living my values in this moment?</p>
<p>Savouring</p>	<p>Bring your attention fully to pleasurable experiences.</p>
	<p>Build memories - when you are doing something enjoyable, remember that these moments are transient and consciously build memories (e.g. by taking some photo's) NB don't focus so much on memory building that you don't enjoy the moment.</p>
	<p>Reminisce - consciously remember a valued past experience with as much detail as possible.</p>
<p>Choosing your values and expressing them moment to moment in your life</p>	<p>Consciously live your values. Notice how it feels and what happens.</p>
	<p>Notice moment to moment - am I living my values in this moment now?</p>
<p>Gratitude</p>	<p>Adopt a general habit of noticing and appreciating what is good in your life</p>
	<p>Write a gratitude letter - compose a detailed letter to someone who has helped you in some way but you have never properly thanked - it is up to you to decide whether to deliver it or not</p>
	<p>3 good things - each evening write down 3 specific 'good' things that happened that day</p>
	<p>Weekly gratitude journal - each week write down 5 things you are grateful for (weekly is the best frequency).</p>

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Forgiveness - letting go of the emotional damage of holding onto a grudge	Choose a particular painful event that you would like to move past. Spend 20 minutes writing about the personal benefits that arose as a result of that event. (NB if the event was very painful, you may need to seek good quality counselling to help you deal with it effectively)
Kindness and generosity	Pick one day a week to engage in 5 acts of kindness towards others
	Notice times when you are kind to others
	Become a wise giver rather than a matcher - be generous to others, ask for what you need, don't sacrifice yourself (Read 'Give and Take' by Adam Grant for more details)
	Practice loving kindness meditation UCLA Guided Meditation - http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22
Compassion	Develop compassion and self compassion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being kind toward oneself and others in instances of pain or failure - recognising that all humans make mistakes and have times when they suffer - holding painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness (mindfulness).(See Kristin Neff's website for suggested activities www.self-compassion.org)
Hope	Ask yourself - if I was hopeful that I could achieve a good outcome here, what would I do? Which of those behaviours could I adopt anyway?
	Treat pessimistic thoughts as passing events that don't have to control you. Hold them lightly and in kindness.
Curiosity	Approach your life with curiosity. Ask yourself - what don't I know here? Treat whatever is in front of you, as if it is interesting. Ask questions. Focus your attention on some aspect of a situation as if it is the first time you have experienced it.

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Identify and develop strengths	<p>Identify your current strengths using the VIA Character strength test. it is available free at the authentic Happiness website. Create a login and then go to the questionnaires section on the site: https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/user/register</p>
	Identify strengths you would like to develop
	Notice times when you are using those strengths
	Think of new ways to express those strengths in your life.
Flow - where you are completely absorbed in a task and lose sense of time	Set aside time to focus without interruption on a challenging task.
Willingness to have painful emotions in the service of doing what matters	Accept that in order to have joy, you have to have times of emotional pain. Notice when fear of emotional pain is holding you back from being the person you want to be.
	Make choices about your behaviour based on your values (what do I want my life to stand for?) rather than letting emotions control your behaviour
	When painful emotions turn up, try to make space for them, soften around them and hold them in kindness.
Build relationships	Share good news with your loved ones, respond to their good news with interest and encouragement (Active, constructive responding)
	Be present with people - give them your full, open, attention
	Treat people like sunsets to be appreciated rather than problems to be solved. Particularly don't try to problem solve their emotions or unwanted thoughts - instead listen with kindness
	Be generous to people - think about both their values and yours when you decide what to give to others and be wary of setting up a reciprocation debt (where you feel like they owe you something).
	Allow yourself to be authentic and vulnerable with others
	Treat vulnerability in others with compassion

Behaviour	Specific activities to try
Live with a sense of meaning and purpose	Each day for 4 days spend 20 minutes writing about your 'best possible self', a future version of yourself who has lived up to your hopes and aspirations. Consider how you are currently expressing those aspirations in your daily behaviours and any changes you may want to consider.
	Keep a MAP Journal - record how much meaning, achievement and pleasure you have each day. Notice which days feel like 'good' days to you - where you have lived your life well (see back page for an example)
Perspective taking	Imagine how an older version of you would see this
	Remember how you saw the world when you were younger
	Think about how others would view your behaviour
	If you 'future you' was a dear friend, what would you do now for their benefit?
	Consider what advice someone wise would give you about your situation
	For a particular event, imagine what the other person thinks and feels about what has happened and how it has affected their life.
Get more sleep	<p>Most of us aren't getting enough sleep. Try making sleep a priority for a week and track your results.</p> <p>Set yourself a 'Go to bed!' alarm; exercise during the day and don't have any caffeine after 2pm. For more details read this blogpost and the links from it: http://www.bakadesuyo.com/2013/08/help-me-sleep/</p>

Each week, pick one activity from the table

Consider finding a buddy to join you in doing these activities, talk every couple of weeks about

1. The activity you tried
2. What happened.

This handout is part of a program I run on building meaning, joy and vitality in life.

You can find more details here:

<http://rachelcollis.com.au/executive-coaching/finding-meaning/>

I do hope you enjoy the activities.

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