

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Tips for Enhancing Your Emotional Wellness



Scientists have been working on defining and measuring happiness for years. They've learned a lot about what influences individual happiness — and, spoiler alert, it's not necessarily wealth. One large study that evaluated the emotional well-being of more than 450,000 people found that their happiness increased along with their annual income, but only until they reached \$75,000. Once they met their basic needs, higher incomes didn't mean greater happiness.

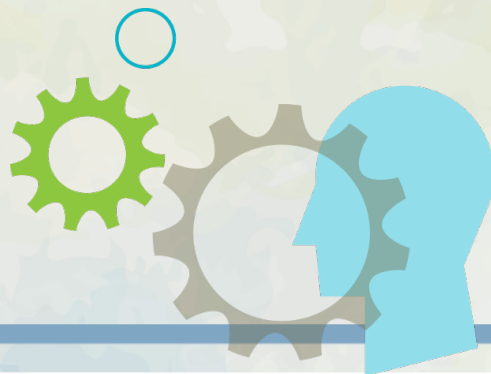
Want to increase your happiness? Research has shown that the following practices can help you feel more joy and happiness in your daily life.

Developing a Brighter Outlook

Having a positive outlook doesn't mean you never feel negative emotions, such as sadness or anger. All emotions—whether positive or negative—are adaptive in the right circumstances. The key seems to be finding a balance between the two.

Positive emotions expand our awareness and open us up to new ideas, so we can grow and add to our toolkit for survival. Yet people need negative emotions to move through difficult situations and respond to them appropriately in the short term. Negative emotions can get us into trouble,





though, if they're based on too much rumination about the past or excessive worry about the future, and they're not really related to what's happening in the here and now.

People who are emotionally well, experts say, have fewer negative emotions and are able to hold on to positive emotions longer. Developing a sense of meaning and purpose in life—and focusing on what's important to you—also contributes to emotional wellness.

Practicing Mindful Meditation

Among those who appear more resilient and better able to hold on to positive emotions are people who've practiced various forms of meditation. One study found changes in reward-related brain circuits after people had two weeks of training in a simple form of meditation that focuses on compassion and kindness. These changes, in turn, were linked to an increase in positive social behaviors, such as increased generosity. Another study found that after six weeks of training in compassion and kindness meditation, people reported increased positive emotions and social connectedness compared to an untrained group. The meditation group also had improved functioning in a nerve that helps to control heart rate. The results suggest that taking time to learn the skills to self-generate positive emotions can help us become healthier, more social, more resilient versions of ourselves.

Utilizing Self-Affirmation

Researchers in the field of neuroscience have explored how self-affirmation—thinking about what's most important to you—can affect your brain and lead to positive, healthful behaviors. When people are asked to think about things that they find meaningful, a brain region that recognizes personally relevant information becomes activated. This activity can change how people respond to health advice.

For example, if you tell people that they sit too much and they need to change their behavior, they can become defensive. They'll come up with reasons why the message doesn't apply to them. However, if before receiving the health message, people reflect on the value they would personally derive from a behavior change, the brain's reward pathways are activated and open.

Being open to positive change is a key to emotional wellness. Sometimes people think that emotions just happen, kind of like the weather. But research suggests that we can have some control over which emotions we experience. As mounting research suggests, having an open, positive mindset might help to improve your physical health as well.

Practicing Loving Kindness, Gratitude and Forgiveness

Being kind to the people you interact with in the course of your day goes a long way. Help someone with a heavy load. Run an errand for your sick neighbor. Give a co-worker a boost with a thoughtful compliment. Research shows that when you demonstrate sincere kindness toward others, it activates a portion of your brain that helps you feel pleasure.





Research has also shown that your generosity of spirit might even be contagious, so you may spread happiness to others as you go.

When researchers worked with highly stressed health care workers to improve their outlook, they found that after 12 weeks the workers reported they were happier and more satisfied with their lives. Part of the intervention included work on gratitude and forgiveness. For instance, you can keep a gratitude journal, jotting down specific things you're grateful for. Instead of rushing to hurt or anger when someone behaves thoughtlessly toward you, choose forgiveness. As you practice these traits, you may find your happiness level increasing too.

Wise Choices: Enhance Your Emotional Wellness!

Follow these tips to develop a more positive mindset:

- Remember your good deeds. Give yourself credit for the good things you do for others each day.
- Forgive yourself. Everyone makes mistakes. Learn from what went wrong, but don't dwell on it.
- Spend more time with your friends. Surround yourself with positive, healthy people.
- Explore your beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life. Think about how to guide your life by the principles that are important to you.
- Develop healthy physical habits. Healthy eating, physical activity, and regular sleep can improve your physical and mental health.

For support with enhancing your emotional wellness, or with any work-life issue that's on your mind, please be reminded that the Employee Assistance Program, **CCA@YourService** offers free, 24/7, confidential support and resources to all employees and their family members.

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