

Practice Happy Habits to Boost Your Psychological Well-Being

Did you know that *happiness* is the single best word that captures the construct, or concept, of well-being? When we are happy, we experience positive emotions that allow us to broaden our perspective and build our resources, according to Dr. Barbara Frederickson, author of *Positivity*.

On the flip side, when we're feeling stressed or overwhelmed or are experiencing the symptoms of depression, we get tunnel vision and make shortsighted decisions out of our instinct for self-preservation. In these situations, we can often have trouble seeing the goodness in life, making it difficult to sustain the healthy habits that make us feel good and keep us on track. At its most basic level, stress can sabotage us and our best efforts.

Here are several strategies you can use to boost your level of happiness—the antidote to stress—in both the short term and long term:

Identify your unique “Flow states.” In his book *Flow*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes *Flow* as the “sweet spot” between challenge and skill. To identify when you are in flow, ask yourself: What am I doing when I...

- am at my most creative?
- lose all sense of time?
- feel most alive?
- am so caught up in the moment that I cease to exist?

By using your flow states, you can expect to more effectively renew and recharge, positioning yourself for greater happiness, life satisfaction and optimal performance.

Practice “Gratitude Spotting” and journaling. Being mindful of and reflecting on the things we are grateful for is key to happiness. Martin E.P. Seligman, author of *Authentic Happiness*, says that people who practice gratitude spotting and journaling are more optimistic and happier. Keep an electronic or paper journal and

plan to find a quiet time and place every day to write down a minimum of three things you're grateful for. By doing this you are establishing a happiness-enhancing habit.

Savor life's pleasures. According to Seligman, *savoring* is an awareness of pleasure and the deliberate, conscious attention to the experience. Focus on these steps:

- Be in the moment and tell others how much it means to you.
- Take a mental or physical souvenir to build a memory, like a shell from the beach where you took your last vacation.
- Fully appreciate and bask in the moment to remind yourself how long you've waited for this good thing.
- Sharpen your perception by zeroing in on the "good stuff," like closing your eyes while you enjoy a piece of music.
- Afterward, absorb and marvel in how you lost yourself in the moment.

Take Action. Pick one strategy you'd like to practice from the list above and develop a goal outlining what you'll do, when you'll do it, for how long, and on which days of the week. After practicing the habit for one to two weeks, do some self-reflection. What benefits did you notice? What did this practice provide for you? What did you learn?

Readjust the goal based on your newfound awareness and keep going. Research shows that there is a positive, cumulative effect when we increase our happiness, decrease our stress levels, and boost our resiliency in the long term.

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Last Reviewed Mar 2020

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