How to be happy



Have you noticed how some people just seem to be happier than others, even though they have many of the same problems and challenges? Although the meaning of happiness varies from person to person and from culture to culture, all human beings have the capacity to be happy. According to American psychologist Martin Seligman, happiness is part of our overall well-being, but happiness *alone* doesn't enable us to flourish. It does not allow us to build deep, lasting relationships with others, feel pleasure, or contribute meaningfully to our communities and to the world. In fact, his belief is that happiness (or "positive emotion") is just one of five elements that, together, allow us to build a fulfilling life. The other four are engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.

Tips and tools you can use

In the same way that our brains develop learning patterns, we can also develop gratitude, resilience, optimism and meaning in our lives. Resilience and optimism alone have been shown to reduce our annual chance of dying by 20 percent! Here are some tips to help you flourish:

- Every day write down three things that went well and why they went well.
- Plan a list of enjoyable things you would like to do more often. Schedule them into your calendar and commit to follow through with them.
- Make a list of people who make you happy and plan to spend more time with them. If some of these people are now far away from you, plan how you can be in touch with them more often or more effectively. In addition to email and phone calls, consider whether occasional audio or web chats would add more value to your communications.
- Consider your personal growth goals and make a commitment to ongoing learning and developing new skills.
- Endeavour to perform every task to the best of your ability.
- Get physically active. Exercise releases endorphins, which leads to a sense of well-being. Whether it's in a club, on your own, indoors or outdoors, there are lots of ways to get active. Pick something you are most likely to enjoy and to commit to over time.
- Begin 'positive self-talk'.
- Find meaning in your life, whether that is being part of a faith community, volunteering, or developing your virtues.
- Set realistic goals. Start with one positive goal for each day. Think about what you can do to change or prevent negative experiences from happening again.
- Reflect on whether you are trying to do too much. If you find that you are going through the day without taking the time or finding the energy to think about what you are doing and about happiness, ask yourself, "how can I change?"

Being grateful

- Every day, write down a few things for which you are deeply grateful.
- Try not limit your thinking to the extreme terms, "never", "always", "everything", and "nothing". Building resilience and optimism is important. Don't be scared to fail and always "try, try again".
- Learn from children, for whom a pretty stone or shell can be a precious treasure.
- Appreciate life. Enjoy the rain; it will be hot and sunny again soon enough. Identify a role model for yourself—alive, deceased, famous, not famous, real or fictional. Someone you admire and who seems to have achieved the goals or the attitude you strive for. When in doubt, ask yourself what your role model would do or say in the same circumstance.
- Commit to looking for both big and small events/circumstances that are positive. This will give you the strength to tackle the negative.

The power of laughter

- Remember that, like exercise, laughter releases endorphins.
- Start by exercising your smiling muscles. Put on a smile at least once a day.
- Share humour and joy with family and friends.
- Broaden your horizons, try something new and don't take it too seriously if you fail. It's okay to sing off key, fall off your bike, or make a funny painting.

Time for yourself

- Make time just for yourself every day. Be mindful of your attitudes and experiences.
- When it comes to taking time for you, it's not always quantity that counts, but quality. There are many ways to create quality time:
    - Praying
    - Meditating and reflecting
    - Visualizing
    - Making or listening to music
    - Gardening (indoor or outdoor)
    - Taking physical care, such as grooming yourself, cleaning, or exercising
    - Seeking a positive environment, such as being in nature, enjoying the company of good friends or listening to those who inspire you
    - Preparing good food, getting a massage for weary muscles and a weary brain, or buying a present for yourself

Time for others

- Helping others often creates positive feelings and brings meaning to our lives.
- Building and maintaining meaningful relationships is important for emotional well-being.
- Keeping up relationships with people who have crossed your path is also important:
    - Recognize people as individuals, not just as part of a group or family
    - Be prepared to practice forgiveness
    - Meet with someone you haven't seen in a while
    - Connect with an aging or ill relative or friend
    - Help someone by looking after their children so they have time to themselves
    - Contribute to a worthy cause