



Learn to Make Happiness a Habit

A habit of contentment can lead to a lifetime of joy.

We anticipate the upcoming weekend, the next promotion, the planned holiday, the long-awaited retirement. But while big, exciting plans can add a dose of excitement to our routines, making a conscious decision to celebrate the smaller moments that comprise our daily lives also can help us stay happy, grateful and fulfilled.

According to a Time magazine article on happiness, “The reason we are so hooked on getting things done is that we believe the payoff that comes from achievements – an award or a larger savings account – will ultimately lead to the biggest payoff of all: happiness. But it doesn’t.” Delaying happiness in favour of future achievements can perpetuate forever, leaving us continually searching for what’s next.

However, you can prioritise joy by taking simple steps. The following advice, gathered from psychologists, research studies and even ancient philosophers, can help you start cultivating a happier life whenever you’re ready.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE PRESENT

While multitasking is valuable, research has shown that being completely immersed in a task can help you feel more satisfied and increase your productivity. Preventing your mind from wandering can be tricky, but you can improve through practice. Some tips to help you stay in the present include focusing your attention on any given chore or object for 10 minutes at a time, engaging in meditation, or spending a half or full day without your phone or computer.

IMAGINE LOSING WHAT YOU LOVE

It may seem counterproductive, but numerous psychologists recommend what’s called negative visualisation, according to

a study in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. The practice of picturing – while not resigning yourself to – unfortunate scenarios can dramatically boost gratitude for current circumstances. In fact, the aforementioned study concluded that thinking about the absence of a positive event from our lives makes us feel even more grateful than reminiscing about a positive life event. Imagine never having met your partner or pretend you can no longer speak to your best friend. If doing so makes you feel even more grateful and relieved they’re in your life, you’re experiencing the benefits of effective negative visualisation.

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EMBRACE YOUR SOCIAL CIRCLE

The happier your relationships are, the happier your life will be. In addition to making you happier, a strong social circle can help you live longer. Author Dan Buettner partnered with National Geographic and the National Institute on Aging to study Blue Zones, areas where people disproportionately live beyond 100 at rates up to 10 times higher than other places. They found that in many of these zones, residents prioritise cultivating close relationships with those in their community, helping provide a sense of purpose and support that proved essential to their overall well-being.

An active social life can even help lower risks of heart problems and high blood pressure, lead to fewer incidences of cancer, and deter osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis, according to research from the Yale Medical Group. Staying social can also lower your risk for Alzheimer’s and mental health issues by helping strengthen connections in your brain. So if you

need a reason to reach out to your friends, you have two: your happiness and well-being.

SWEAT THE BIG STUFF

You may have heard the quote by Erma Bombeck, “Worrying is like a rocking chair: It gives you something to do, but never gets you anywhere.” So why do we fixate on things we can’t control? One of the central beliefs of Stoicism – a revered ancient Greek school of philosophy – is that if something concerns us, we should ask ourselves: Can I fix it? If the answer is “yes,” focus on searching for a solution. If the answer is “no,” then there’s no point in dwelling on it.

This can be applied to many aspects of our lives, from stressing about a sudden thunderstorm ruining an outdoor event to fearing the gyrations of a market cycle. If something concerns us and it’s out of our control, the best we can do is prepare for the worst, while keeping in mind that no amount of worrying will change the outcome. Once you’ve taken thoughtful precautions to assuage your fears, it’s time to turn your attention to more productive matters.

Sources: bakadesuyo.com; Time magazine; Journal of Personality and Social Psychology