



Happy Hacks for More Positivity and Increased Well-Being

We all experience fluctuations in happiness levels throughout our lives – personally and as a group. In 2020, national polls showed happiness levels were at their lowest in 50 years among Americans. (1, 2) But as of June 2021, those levels have risen to be the highest they have seen in the last 13 years. (3) Our lives are bombarded with negativity, stress, and countless threats to our emotional well-being, work, and closest relationships. The research-based happiness advantage shows that when we experience happiness and positivity, it turns on all the learning centers in the brain and fuels positive outcomes in all aspects of our lives.

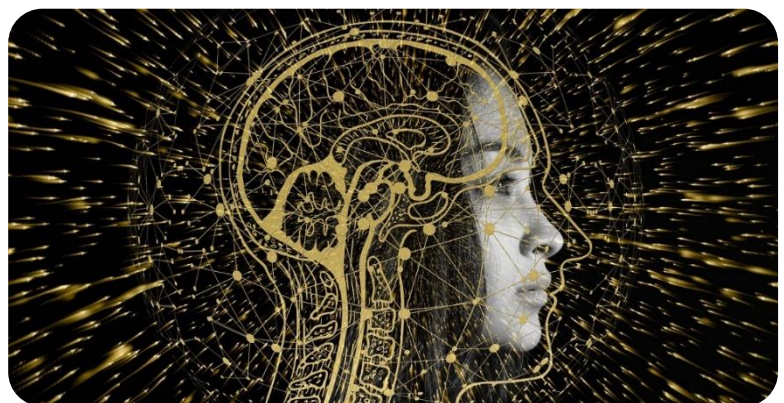
3 Types of Happiness

- Pleasant Life: Our positive emotions, pleasures and fun things we enjoy.
- Good Life: Using our virtues and strengths to find our flow and be a person of good character.
- Meaningful Life: Contributing to something higher – something that gives purpose and meaning to life. (4)

We are more

- **Creative (3 times more)**
- **Productive (31% more)**
- **Energetic (23% less fatigue)**
- **Intelligent**

when we are positive and happy!! (5)



Barriers to Positivity: List possible barriers to being positive.



We are wired to notice the negative and we need to retrain our brains to be more positive. Happiness is about 50% genetic, and 10% is due to outside circumstances like money, home, marriage, children, etc.

But 40% is through intentional activity – your thoughts and actions – things that you have control over!! (10) We can decide to be happy!

So HOW do we become more happy and positive?? Following are 10 ways or “hacks” to become happier. A hack is a creative solution to a problem or challenge. Practice these hacks often enough to make them a habit.

10 Happy Hacks

- Give thanks or practice gratitude. Doing so will improve/increase mood, optimism, social support, and physical and psychological health. Try journaling, or just start your day by thinking of three things you are grateful for. Take a moment now and list three things you are grateful for:

1

2

3

- Smile more. Smiling is contagious and makes you feel good! Studies show that smiling stimulates the reward system in our brains in a way that even chocolate does not. (6) Try to use the 10:5 rule when it comes to smiling. When you are within 10 feet of someone, you smile. Then when you are within five feet, say hello. Try to make this a common practice and see how you feel.
- Get moving. Proper exercise, diet and sleep is good for us but also teaches the brain that your behavior matters and can decrease stress and anxiety by 20%. Regular exercise boosts positive neurochemicals that reduces stress and anxiety - so it can be one of the fastest happiness boosters.
- Use your strengths. Identify and focus on the character strengths you feel you align with most strongly and they will improve your well-being. Examples of character strengths or traits are honesty, fairness, forgiveness, humor, perseverance, hope, creativity, gratitude, spirituality, etc. Suggested activity: You can go to the VIA Institute on Character website at www.viacharacter.org and take a free little quiz that helps you to identify your strengths.
- Start your day positively and record it. The negative mindset we may adopt first thing in the morning sticks with us all day, so purposely find something positive to start each day. That might be journaling, exercise, reading, praying or music. Create a record to hold on to the good in your life.
- Find your flow. When you find your "flow" that is the moment when creativity and productivity collide. It is that moment when you are immersed in something you find so enjoyable. Take a moment and write down when you have found your "flow?" What were you doing? Some examples may include reading, doing a puzzle, doing a physical activity like dancing, hiking, skiing, swimming.



"A state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it."

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

- Pay attention. Studies have shown that people are less happy when their minds wander than when the person is more focused. (7) Practicing meditation and mindfulness causes an increase

in the gray matter of the brain which is responsible for focus and attention. Mindfulness brings you back to the present moment and helps you focus on what you are doing. It is a great stress reliever because you are thinking about the present moment, and not worried about what you have done in the past or what might happen in the future.

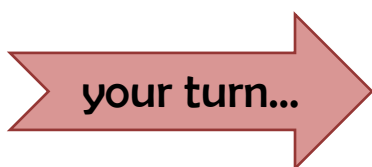
- Practice kindness. Dr. Martin Seligman says that doing a kind act produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise he has tested. Several studies show that pursuing happiness for others brings more personal happiness than pursuing happiness for yourself. (8) Try to text or message two people before 10:00 AM for a few days. The text should be something that is uplifting or thoughtful like "Hope you have a nice day today" or "Thinking of you today". See how this makes you feel and how it affects others.
- Drop grudges. Holding on to a grudge is not healthy and a big obstacle to happiness. It is healthier for you to release the feelings of resentment. Forgiveness is an act of choosing to let go of the pain and hurt and is a way to happiness.
- Cherish your friends. Research on predictors of longevity show that social integration or socialization is vital for long life. (9) Emotional isolation is a more dangerous health risk than smoking or high blood pressure. So, avoid social isolation and make a point to stay in touch with family and friends.

"As I walked out the door to the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I would still be in prison."

Nelson Mandela

Consider implementing one or more of these simple science-backed principles and practices into your lives to improve personal well-being and happiness levels!

Ways that I will try to improve my personal well-being and happiness:



- _____
- _____
- _____



Additional Resources:

Podcasts:

The Science of Happiness
Better than Happy
Live Happy Now
The Science of Success

Apps:

Headspace
Happify
5 Minute Journal
Calm
Happy Not Perfect



Greater Good Science Center website at <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>
Pursuit of Happiness website at www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/

Books:

The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuel Success and Performance at Work by Shawn Achor

Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier by Robert A. Emmons, PhD
Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the 3 to 1 Ratio That Will Change Your Life by Barbara L. Fredrickson, PhD

Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment by Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD

The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want by Sonja Lyubomirsky

The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression One Small Change at a Time by Alex Korb, PhD

Unwinding Anxiety: New Science Shows How to Break the Cycles of Worry and Fear to Heal Your Mind by Judson Brewer, MD, PhD

References:

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Author: Cheri Burcham, University of Illinois Extension, Family Life Educator.

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Reviewed by: Tessa Hobbs-Curley, University of Illinois Extension, Family Life Educator.

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