

9 Ridiculously Simple Ways To Feel Happier Today

T i n y T o t P r e s c h o o l P a r e n t N e w s l e t t e r

T h e H u f f i n g t o n P o s t | b y C a t h e r i n e P e a r s o n

Happiness, the thinking often goes, is one of those things you either have or don't have based on some unknown combination of life circumstances and natural disposition. You have a good day at work; someone does something that cracks you up and, voila. Bliss! Rough day at work, someone was a jerk and suddenly you're miserable. But positive psychologists have long believed that happiness is actually a quality that can be cultivated -- a habit, or series of habits that can be practiced. Here are a few recommendations for small changes you can make to quickly (and easily!) change your mood:

1. Smile

There's a reason why people always talk about faking it 'til you make it: "When we smile, the muscles in our face send signals to our brain that help create -- biologically -- a better mood than when we frown," said positive psychologist Barbara Holstein, EdD. She encourages people to sit for a minute and just grin. Or better yet, smile at someone. This helps establish immediate connection -- another key to feeling upbeat.

2. Schedule something fun.

Everyone needs something to look forward to, and while dreaming about a fantasy trip, or a job you'd love to have 5 or 10 years down the road can provide a boost, there's value in putting something tangible on your calendar within the coming weeks or months. The anticipation of having a nice experience coming up not-too-far-down-the road -- like dinner at a new restaurant or a day trip to the country -- breeds joy.

3. Express gratitude

Numerous studies have shown that gratitude is intimately connected with happiness, and there are lots of ways to find time for a few, focused moments of reflection daily. Give it some thought in the car, or on the subway on your way to work. To take it to the next level, write gratitude letters to a specific person (which you don't even have to send), or try a gratitude journal -- just don't feel pressure to write in it every day.

4. Be kind to someone

Do something small and simple, like letting someone go ahead of you in line at the grocery store or call your 85-year-old great aunt who loves to hear from you, Holstein said. Acts of kindness increase well-being because they're concrete. Another idea? Focus on one person -- a boyfriend or girlfriend, a parent -- and for one week really think about what you could do to make them happier. Then do it.

5. Walk. Better yet, walk outside

"When you exercise, chemicals are released in the brain that cause happiness." Fifteen to 20 minutes of walking and the chemicals start kicking in, and the more you do it, the stronger that reaction in the brain becomes." For a double-whammy, take your walk in nature. Studies show that putting one foot in front of the other outdoors ... even for just a few minutes ... can help boost mood.

6. Eat something healthy

"Hangry" people are not happy people, and sometimes the simplest mood-upping-fix is a quick nosh on something relatively healthy. "Dark chocolate, in moderation, is a good thing," she added. "Eat a balanced snack with proteins, carbs and fats, which balances blood sugar and improves mood." Maybe grab an apple with some cheddar cheese or peanut butter, spread an avocado on toast or dip into a greek yogurt with whatever fruit topping suits your fancy.

7. Pretend you're relocating

Imagine that this month is the last month they're going to live in their hometown. "People really change," she said. "They change what activities they do -- they savor their friends and their neighbors." What might you embrace, or what nearby adventures might you finally prioritize if you were moving soon?

8. "Flow"

"Flow" refers to activities that you get involved in, where you forget time and place, that can happen with writing, with music, with cooking. As long as you're not throwing yourself into your chosen activity to distract yourself from other problems in your life, tapping into that feeling can produce big happiness gains. So get dancing, painting ... fill-in-the-blank.

9. Call a (not-just-on-Facebook) friend.

A main contributor to happiness is social contact. For the biggest emotional payoff, think beyond Facebook or Twitter acquaintances and get in touch with someone you're genuinely close to. "It can be e-mail -- it doesn't have to be face-to-face -- but it has to be with someone you know in order for that to really work. Here's an idea: combine two happiness hacks and call a friend while you take a walk outside? It's truly good for your health.