

BEST POSSIBLE SELF

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **15 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Sometimes our goals in life can be elusive. But research suggests that building optimism about the future can motivate people to work toward that desired future and thus make it more likely to become a reality.

This exercise asks you to imagine your life going as well as it possibly could, then write about this best possible future. By doing so, research suggests that you'll not only increase your happiness in the present but pave the way for sustained happiness down the line.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes per day for two weeks

HOW TO DO IT

Take a moment to imagine your life in the future. What is the best possible life you can imagine? Consider all of the relevant areas of your life, such as your career, academic work, relationships, hobbies, and health. What would happen in these areas of your life in your best possible future?

For the next 15 minutes, write continuously about what you imagine this best possible future to be. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process.

1. It may be easy for this exercise to lead you to examine how your current life may not match this best possible future. You may be tempted to think about ways in which accomplishing goals has been difficult for you in the past, or about financial/time/social barriers to being able to make these accomplishments happen. For the purpose of this exercise, however, we encourage you to focus on the future—imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make this best possible life happen.
2. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about a new job, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you'll get out of it.
3. Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don't worry about grammar or spelling.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). [How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves](#). *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(2), 73-82.

Undergraduate students in Missouri who completed the Best Possible Self exercise daily for two weeks showed increases in positive emotions right afterward. Those who kept up with the exercise even after the study was over

continued to show increases in positive mood one month later.

Who Has Tried the Practice?

While the students in the study above were mostly white and female, additional studies have explored how this exercise benefits other groups and cultures:

- [Norwegians](#) in a four-week online program who did Best Possible Self (along with various other well-being exercises) reported increases in emotional well-being lasting six months, regardless of gender, age, or education level.
- [Diverse American undergraduates](#) (mostly of Asian, Latino, or white descent) wrote about their Best Possible Self once a week for four weeks and experienced gains in positive emotions and social connection.
- [Mostly Asian and Hispanic American undergraduates](#) who spent 15 minutes per week writing about their Best Possible Self for eight weeks felt happier immediately afterward and six months later, but only if they chose the practice and put a lot of effort into it.
- [International students](#) at a culturally diverse university in the United Arab Emirates completed Best Possible Self as part of a 13-week happiness program and reported higher levels of well-being afterward.
- People with [troubled children](#), [anxiety disorders](#), [eating disorders](#), or [clinical depression](#) all wrote about their Best Possible Self across several weeks and showed improvements in mental health.
- [South Korean](#) and [Chinese university students](#) who did Best Possible Self as part of six- and eight-week wellness programs increased in well-being and decreased in depression, respectively.
- [Chinese](#) and [Singaporean university students](#) who spent at least 15 minutes writing about their Best Possible Self reported improvements in emotional well-being.
- [Chronic pain patients with physical disabilities](#) completed Best Possible Self during an eight-week program, and [fibromyalgia patients](#) wrote about their Best Possible Self at least three times a week for four weeks. Both groups increased in emotional well-being and decreased in pain symptoms.
- [Iranian cardiac patients](#) who wrote about their Best Possible Self during a six-week wellness program displayed improvements in happiness, hope, depression, and stress biomarkers.
- [Indian adolescents](#) reported gains in well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness after writing about their Best Possible Self as part of a well-being program.

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

WHY TO TRY IT

By thinking about your best possible future self, you can learn about yourself and what you want in life. This way of thinking can help you restructure your priorities in life in order to reach your goals. Additionally, it can help you increase your sense of control over your life by highlighting what you need to do to achieve your dreams.

SOURCES

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[Jeffrey Huffman, M.D.](#), Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

