

CREATING AND RECALLING POSITIVE EVENTS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **1 DAY**

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

One of the most direct ways to increase happiness is to do more of the things that make us happy. But when life gets busy, we don't always remember to make time for enjoyable activities. Intentionally scheduling a variety of enjoyable activities into the day can help overcome this barrier to happiness.

This exercise prompts you to engage in a variety of activities associated with happiness and reflect on how they make you feel. Different kinds of activities bring different kinds of satisfaction, all of which contribute uniquely to happiness. Research suggests that variety and novelty in daily activities is an important component of happiness, so trying a number of different activities can prevent you from getting so used to any one activity that it ceases to bring you pleasure.

TIME REQUIRED

The better part of one day

HOW TO DO IT

This exercise is best completed on a day (or two) when you have a lot of free time, such as on a weekend. Step two may require some advanced planning with others. In the morning when you first wake up, review the following instructions and make a plan for the day.

1. Choose an activity that you enjoy doing alone, such as reading, listening to music, watching a TV show, or meditating. Set aside some time during the day to complete this activity.
2. Choose an activity that you enjoy doing with others, such as going out for coffee, going for a bike ride, or watching a movie. Set aside some time during the day to complete this activity.
3. Choose an activity that you consider personally important and meaningful, such as helping a neighbor, calling to check in on a friend who is sick, or volunteering for a local charitable organization.
4. At the end of the day, record what occurred during and after each of your three activities. What did you do, and how did it make you feel? Did different activities make you feel different kinds of happiness? What feelings or associations linger with you now, after you have completed all of the activities?

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. (2005). [Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life](#). *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6(1), 25-41.

Seeking happiness through pleasurable, engaging, and meaningful activities was found to predict life satisfaction in a sample of 845 adults. Activities that involved deep mental engagement or meaningful pursuits were more strongly associated with happiness than pleasure-seeking activities, but the combination of all three types of activity was associated with the highest levels of life satisfaction.

Huffman, J. C., DuBois, C. M., Healy, B. C., Boehm, J. K., Kashdan, T. B., Celano, C. M., Denninger, J. W., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). [Feasibility and utility of positive psychology exercises for suicidal inpatients](#). *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 36(1), 88-94.

Psychiatric patients hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or behaviors reported increased optimism and decreased hopelessness after completing this exercise.

WHY TO TRY IT

Engaging in a range of activities can prevent “habituation,” which is the tendency to get used to things that we do regularly—and thus derive less satisfaction from them. What’s more, research suggests that combining activities that are related to different kinds of happiness (e.g., pleasure-based happiness vs. meaning-based happiness) can promote greater overall happiness than focusing on only one kind of happiness. Reflecting on enjoyable activities at the end of the day can make us more likely to store those experiences in memory and derive pleasure from them later on.

SOURCES

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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](#).

