GIVE IT UP

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: VARIABLE

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Research suggests that one of the biggest challenges to lasting happiness is our great capacity for adaptation: We tend to get used to the things that bring us pleasure in life, and, before long, their positive effects wear off. We no longer enjoy them in the way we once did.

However, research has identified a way to sustain these little pleasures over time: by temporarily giving them up. That can lead us to enjoy and savor that activity more once we resume it—and the ability to savor the small pleasures in life is a key to happiness. This practice guides you through the process of abstaining from a pleasurable activity for a week as a way to heighten your appreciation of it. Over time, the goal is not only to derive more pleasure from this activity but to recognize how we take lots of pleasures for granted and to try to savor them more.

TIME REQUIRED

Daily for one week. See if you can give up a different pleasure for one week each month.

HOW TO DO IT

1. **Select something that you enjoy doing on a regular basis and that you have unlimited or nearly unlimited access to.** A good choice may be a particular food or beverage that you enjoy, such as chocolate or soda.
2. **On day one, allow yourself to indulge as you normally would in this activity.** Scarf down a chocolate bar. Pour yourself a cold beverage. Veg out in front of the TV.
3. **Then, for one week, do not allow yourself to indulge in this pleasure at all.** If you're giving up chocolate, avoid any foods that contain it; if you're giving up TV, try not to even watch a video on your phone.
4. **At the end of the week, allow yourself to indulge again.** As you do so, pay attention to how you feel. Are you noticing certain physical sensations (e.g., taste and texture of the chocolate) more than usual? How pleasurable is the experience? What kind of mood are you in?
5. **Try to go through this same process with a different pleasure the following month. In between these weeks of Give It Up, try to focus your attention on the pleasures you enjoy every day.** What are the activities or experiences that you actually enjoy doing? What do you enjoy about them—how do they make you feel? How do you think you would feel if you were prevented from enjoying these activities ever again?

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Quoidbach, J., & Dunn., E. W. (2013). Give it up: A strategy for combating hedonic adaptation. *Social Psychological*

and Personality Science, *5*, 511-516.

Canadian college students (mostly women) who were instructed to give up chocolate for a week savored it significantly more and experienced greater positive mood when they ate it again at the end of the week, compared with people who either indulged in it extra over that week or received no special instructions and just consumed their normal amount.

Who Has Tried the Practice?

This practice has not been extensively studied in diverse groups and cultures.

WHY TO TRY IT

One of the greatest enemies to happiness is "hedonic adaptation," which is the tendency for people to grow accustomed to pleasurable things and therefore appreciate them less. Temporarily giving up pleasurable activities counteracts hedonic adaptation and can thus increase the pleasure derived from those activities.

Giving something up and then coming back to it later can build anticipation and make the experience feel more novel and exciting. It can also make people more likely to focus on and savor the pleasurable aspects of the experience rather than giving in to distractions. We often assume that more is better—that the greatest pleasures should come from abundance and indulgence—but research suggests that some degree of scarcity and restraint is more conducive to happiness.

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.