

USE YOUR STRENGTHS

Difficulty: MODERATE | Frequency: 1X/DAY | Duration: 30 MINS



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Sometimes we give our weaknesses and limitations more attention than our strengths. Yet research suggests that thinking about personal strengths can increase our happiness and reduce depression.

This exercise asks you to identify one of your personal strengths—a positive trait that contributes to your character, such as kindness or perseverance—and consider how you could use it in a new and different way. Recognizing and exercising these strengths can make them stronger and better equip you to meet life’s challenges.

TIME REQUIRED

Every day for a week. Time required each day will vary depending on how you choose to exercise your strengths.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Take a moment to think about one of your personal strengths—for instance, creativity, perseverance, kindness, modesty, or curiosity. Consider how you could use this strength today in a new and different way. For example, if you choose the personal strength of perseverance, you might make a list of tasks that you have found challenging recently, then try to tackle each one of them. Or if you choose curiosity, you might attempt an activity that you’ve never tried before.
2. Describe in writing the personal strength you plan to use today and how you are going to use it. Then, go ahead and do it—act on your strength as frequently as possible throughout the day.
3. Repeat the steps above every day for a week. You may use the same personal strength across multiple days, or try using a new personal strength each day.
4. At the end of the week, write about the personal strengths that you focused on during the week and how you used them. Write in detail about what you did, how you felt, and what you learned from the experience.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). [Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions](#). *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421.

American adults (mostly white) tried using a personal strength each day for one week. Compared with those who didn’t try to use a strength—but instead wrote about early memories—they reported an increase in happiness and a decrease in symptoms of depression immediately after the one-week experiment, and those benefits persisted six months later.

Who Has Tried the Practice?

Additional studies explore how this exercise benefits other groups and cultures:

- [Chinese university freshmen](#) took a 90-minute course in which they identified five personal strengths and brainstormed ways to apply them. Their well-being, depression, anxiety, stress, and negative emotions improved after completing at least one personal strength activity in the following week. However, these improvements faded a year after the course.
- [Japanese high school girls](#) and [adults with visual impairments](#) identified three to five of their personal strengths and used one of them in a new and different way each day for a week. The high school girls increased in confidence and self-esteem within that week. The adults with visual impairments were happier and had better self-esteem after the exercise and one month later.
- [Malaysian college students](#) identified five personal strengths and used them in new ways each day for a week. The students were happier and less depressed for at least one month afterward.
- [Indian adolescents](#) reported greater well-being, satisfaction with life, and happiness after a week of the Use Your Strengths exercise, especially if they tried new ways to use their strengths each day.
- [Pakistani university students](#) who did a four-week version of Use Your Strengths reported higher well-being immediately afterward.
- [Turkish university freshman](#) who performed Use Your Strengths increased in well-being during an eight-week online program.
- [Tunisian college students](#) who applied a new personal strength each day for 24 days reported greater happiness afterward.
- [Elderly women in Switzerland](#) became happier after using their personal strengths in a new way each day for a week.
- [Black and Hispanic LGBTQ+ young adults in Canada](#) completed an extended version of Use Your Strengths, guided by instructors, during a multiweek program. They showed increases in self-esteem and self-efficacy that lasted up to two years afterward.

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

WHY TO TRY IT

While working to improve shortcomings is important for well-being, it is also important to nurture our strengths and put them to use. Reflecting on these strengths can help remind people that they do have important positive qualities, and this reminder can build confidence and self-esteem—and, in turn, increase happiness. Putting strengths to use can help enhance them, and using strengths in new and different ways can reveal how useful these strengths can be in a range of contexts.

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](#).

