

Your Happiness is Important

What is happiness and how do you get more of it? Happiness is hard to define precisely, but you can think of it as a deep sense of flourishing as a human being, the experience that you are living a meaningful and satisfying life.

Experts estimate that only 17 percent of American adults are flourishing. That leaves a lot of room for improvement. The good news is that recent research demonstrates that most people can increase their happiness.

When people are happy, they:

- enjoy their lives more,
- are more creative,
- are more flexible at problem-solving,
- show more resilience when things go wrong,
- are more effective at work,
- are more satisfied at home,
- have fewer physical illnesses,
- live longer, with better quality of life.

Solving your problems won't make you happy

Sound strange? A lot of us devote a lot of time and energy to solving our problems, sometimes with the unspoken belief that this will make us happy. But that's like expecting that recovering from the flu will make us physically fit. Of course, you can't just ignore your problems, but researchers now believe that the best way to be happier is to have an active happiness strategy.

Psychologist Martin Seligman and his colleagues suggest three interdependent components to a happy and satisfying life: The Pleasant Life, The Engaged Life and The Meaningful Life. In this article we will discuss strategies for the Pleasant Life. We will take up the other two types of happiness in subsequent articles.

The pleasant life

The pleasant life is rich in positive emotions such as joy, contentment, excitement, love and achievement. Researchers who have studied business teams, married couples and individuals have found that people are at their best when they experience genuine positive emotions about three times as often as they experience negative emotions.

Positive feelings build resilience, allowing you to bounce back more readily from life's setbacks. They allow you to build an emotional reserve that you can draw on in times of trouble or adversity.

Positive emotions are contagious. Consider a time when you experienced someone whose “enthusiasm is contagious.” Your own good feelings help create a positive environment wherever you go. This, in turn, makes it easier for you to maintain and build on your positive experiences.

The key to cultivating genuine positive emotions is to develop physical and mental habits that promote your emotional and psychological well-being. The choices you make about what you pay attention to, how you take care of your body, and how you approach your life can have a significant impact on how you feel.

Here are some ideas for cultivating positive emotions:

Do more things you enjoy more often.

- Identify three things that you really enjoy. Examples: time with someone you enjoy, getting a massage, volunteering at a soup kitchen.
- Start by doing one of them one more time each week.

Protect and build your physical health, which is the physiological basis for positive feelings.

- Eat well and exercise regularly: research has repeatedly shown that a good diet and regular exercise increase your energy and improve your mood.
- Get enough sleep; for most people, a minimum of seven hours of sleep a night is required for optimal health. If adequate sleep is a challenge for you, consult with a knowledgeable resource such as your doctor or EAC.

Pay attention to the good things in your life.

- At the end of each day, write down three good things that happened that day.
- Practice gratitude with a gratitude journal, where you regularly write down the things that you are grateful for.
- Make it a point to thank the people to whom you feel grateful.

Cultivate an attitude of realistic optimism.

Look for the ways in which your glass is half full, and focus on them. In an adverse situation, the realistic optimist seeks an accurate appraisal of the problem (research shows that it’s likely to be more accurate than the pessimist’s appraisal), and focuses on the specific steps that can be taken to increase the likelihood of a positive outcome.

- When something difficult happens, ask yourself, “what lessons can I learn from this?” and “what step(s) could I take that would make a positive outcome more likely?” If you can, take those steps.
- Avoid blaming yourself for things that you don’t actually control.

Take time to relax: Each day take time out of *doing things* and just *be*.

- Spend 20-30 minutes per day in meditation, prayer or reflection if you can manage it.
- Take 5-10 minutes if that is all you can do.

Keep in mind that creating and maintaining new habits can be difficult. Use support to help you make the changes you want to make. The most important thing is that you do something; don't try to change everything at once. Include Employee Assistance Consulting in your list of resources; consultants can help you identify your goals and the best strategies for achieving them.

In addition, people with depression and related conditions face particular challenges in cultivating positive emotions and should seek the advice of a licensed behavioral-health expert. EAC consultants can help you locate a qualified provider in your area.

EAC's consultants are available to team members and their families anytime at 1-888-327-0027. EAC Online has additional information and links which can be reached from any Wells Fargo computer.

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