

Don't Worry – Be Happy: How to Develop Happiness Habits

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Happiness is the key to so much of our daily lives. It not only affects how we feel but also everyone around us. We've all heard that the external world won't make us happy. So, the big question is: what can we do to be happy?

Research seems to prove the point that happiness is worth the effort. In one famous study, scientists monitored nuns who kept journals. Those who wrote more positive words lived longer than those who were more negative. Psychologist Barbara Frederickson says that positive emotions help our brains work better and to make more social connections. "Your happy and relaxed brain has more intellectual capacity than your brain under stress," she says. "Being positive actually helps us learn more. And you will make more friends. Everyone enjoys being around someone who is happy."

So let's take a look at some "happiness habits" you can employ right now that will train your brain and hopefully put you on the path to happiness.

- **Express Gratitude:** What are you thankful for? Write it down. Research found that those who kept a daily gratitude list not only felt better about their lives, but also exercised more and reported fewer physical complaints. So, over dinner with friends, or before you go to bed, express your thanks for three things that day.
- **Get Physical:** That's right, exercise. Studies show that exercise produces endorphins, or "feel good" chemicals. Exercise in the morning and those chemicals will help you feel more upbeat and ready to take the day on.
- **Meditate:** A good idea to calm your mind and reduce stress is to practice daily meditation. Freeing up your mind of the usual mental chatter, by focusing on your breath for five minutes each day, will help you relax and keep your focus, even when you're not meditating.
- **Random Acts of Kindness:** Think about the last time you helped someone. How did it make you feel? By focusing on other people's needs and feelings, you learn to change your own view of yourself. One study found that people who performed a few acts of kindness each week, even small ones, felt better about themselves for more than a month afterwards.

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Remember, the key to creating happiness is to train your brain. Start by creating one new happiness habit. If you encounter little roadblocks to your daily practice, then engage your brain. Find ways to make it easier to start the new habit. For instance, make a commitment with a friend to attend exercise class every morning or try putting a journal on your nightstand to write down your thankful thoughts from the day. Happiness might seem tough to achieve sometimes, but it will have a positive effect on the most important parts of our lives, our health and the people we care about. Don't worry – be happy!