

# Become Happier

Practice 10 fun strategies.



by Sonja Lyubomirsky

**W**HY ARE SOME PEOPLE happier than others? What are the benefits (and costs) of happiness? Is it possible for you to become happier than you are now, and to stay that way?

I've studied happiness for 20 years, and my research suggests that *lasting happiness is attainable, if you are prepared to do the work*. Becoming lastingly happier (like becoming fit for life) requires you to engage in some daily practices.

## 10 Happiness Practices

I find that 10 happiness-increasing practices work best (focus on those that fit you best—ones that seem most natural and enjoyable to you):

**1. Count your blessings.** Keep a *gratitude journal* and record *things for which you are thankful*—from flowers to your child's first steps. Do this once a week, perhaps on Sunday night. Vary your entries and how you express them. If there's a particular person who's been kind or influential in your life, express your appreciation. Write them a letter; or visit and thank them in person.

**2. Practice acts of kindness.** These should be both *random* (let the dad with the crying baby go ahead of you at the check-out counter) and *systematic* (read a newspaper to an elderly neighbor). Being kind to others, whether friends or strangers, triggers many positive effects. It makes you feel compassionate and capable, gives you a greater sense of connection with others and earns you smiles, approval, and reciprocated kindness. These are happiness boosters.

**3. Nurture optimism.** This involves such practices as looking at the bright side, finding the silver lining in a negative event, noticing what is right, feeling good about your future, or simply feeling that you can get through the day. You might sit in a quiet place and think about and write down what you expect your life to be 10 years from now. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You've worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing your life goals. Think of this as the realization of all of your life dreams. Then, write about what you imagined.

**4. Learn to forgive.** Let go of anger, resentment, and feelings of vengeance

by writing—but not sending—a letter of forgiveness to a person who has hurt or wronged you. The inability to forgive is associated with dwelling on revenge; forgiving allows you to move on.

**5. Increase flow experiences.** When you're so absorbed in what you're doing that you don't notice the passage of time, you are in a state of *flow*. So, become fully engaged at work, at home and at play. Increase the flow experiences in your life, whether it's completing a project at the office, playing with your children, or enjoying a hobby. Seek work and leisure activities that engage your skills and expertise.

**6. Invest in relationships.** Strong personal relationships safeguard your happiness. Indeed, having the support of someone who deeply cares about you is one of the best remedies for unhappiness. This strategy involves putting effort into healing, cultivating, and enjoying your relationships with family and friends. Act with love, be as kind to the people close to you as you are to strangers, affirm them, share with them, and play together.

**7. Avoid over-thinking.** There's a time to think about the bad stuff in your life, but dwelling on your problems excessively is unhealthy. Happy people have the capacity—even during a trying time, such as a chronic illness—to be absorbed in an engaging activity, stay busy, and have fun. To practice this strategy, pick a distracting, attention-grabbing activity that has compelled you in the past and do it when you notice yourself dwelling.

**8. Savor life's joys.** Notice and take delight in momentary pleasures, wonders, and magical moments. Focus on the sweetness of a ripe mango, aroma of a bakery, or warmth of the sun when you step out from the shade. Take some "mental photographs" of pleasurable moments to review in less happy times.

**9. Take care of your soul.** Religious and spiritual people tend to be happier and healthier. Perhaps the *social support* of belonging to a close-knit religious group is valuable, as is the meaning and purpose that comes from believ-

ing in something greater than yourself. You might join a church, temple, or mosque; read a spiritually-themed book; or volunteer for a faith-based charity.

**10. Commit to your goals.** People who have strong dreams or aspirations and strive for something significant, whether it's learning a new craft or raising moral children, are far happier. Happy people have worthwhile projects. However, being dedicated to any pursuit won't make you happy if you're doing it just to make money, boost your ego, or appease peer pressure.

Your goals should include maintaining your body: exercise, meditation, smiling, and rest. Getting plenty of sleep, exercising, stretching, meditating, smiling, and laughing all enhance your mood in the short term and promote energy and strong mental health. Practiced regularly, they can help make your daily life more satisfying and increase long-term happiness.

Learn practices and habits that will help you *achieve* higher levels of happiness—and to *maintain* those levels. You shouldn't just *pursue* happiness—you should *create* it yourself. **PE**

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**ACTION:** Develop daily happiness habits.



**When destruction, loss, confusion and tension abound,** you may try to find joy. But joy is within you—there's no real finding to it. The penalties of life that seem to hamper joy, the compounding setbacks, will send you directly home—home being joy—as long as you take the long view and the long way home. Failure is only failure if you tell yourself it's so. Joy outlasts it every time. Plant your feet firmly in your allegiance to joy. You are made of it, celestial stuff, such that no one and nothing steps between you and your joy—if your heart is open and you take the long way home. Joy will find you, no matter what. Out of misfortune can come happiness; a house of tragedy can become a house of joy. You may experience betrayal and sorrow, but ultimately love and hope carry the day. I know that despite life's many adversities, healing becomes possible. I am awed by some people's ability to make a great life despite their heart-breaking trials. I honor their courage and perseverance to triumph over the hard times. Deep connection bind like-hearted people—those bonds have the power to heal and transform lives.

—Barbara Richardson, [www.barbarakrichardson.com](http://www.barbarakrichardson.com)