

# How to Better Take Charge of Your OWN HAPPINESS

**Life can come with its share of difficulties, which can sometimes negatively impact your happiness. But while you can't control the circumstances of every situation, you do have influence over your own actions and thoughts. And those can make a huge difference in how happy you feel.**

**Read on for info on how to better take charge of your own happiness.**

## Strengthen Your Relationships

An 85-year Harvard study found that good relationships are key to long-term happiness.<sup>1</sup> In another study, psychologists Ed Diener and Marty Seligman found that people who scored in the highest tenth percentile on happiness surveys were significantly more social than the rest of the individuals surveyed.<sup>2</sup>

So if you want to feel happier, prioritize connecting with those you care about. Even when your schedule gets hectic, it's important to still block out time on your calendar for socializing.

## Practice an Attitude of Gratitude

According to Laurie Santos, Professor of Psychology at Yale University, grateful people tend to be happier and show lower levels of stress hormones like cortisol.<sup>3</sup> Healthcare workers who keep a gratitude journal show reductions in stress and depression. And people with chronic pain show improvements in sleep quality and mood when they practice thankfulness.

Even something as simple as a five-minute daily gratitude journal can increase your long-term well-being by more than ten percent.<sup>4</sup>

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness.<sup>5</sup> So grab a notebook and jot down just a few things you're thankful for each day—it might make a bigger difference than you think.

## Be in the Moment

Ever notice how much time you spend dwelling on the past or stressing about the future? It happens so naturally that it's almost second nature, but focusing your attention on what can't be changed (the past) or what hasn't happened yet (the future) is a common way to diminish your happiness.

Whenever you catch your mind drifting, do your best to bring it back to what's right in front of you. Being mentally present for your own life is one of the best ways to appreciate what you experience throughout the day.

Meditation is effective training for being mentally present. Studies have shown the impact of meditation on improving both immediate and long-term happiness.<sup>6</sup> Think of it like a gym for your brain; just as it's important to take care of your physical body through exercise, it's also important to strengthen your mind through meditation.

## A Little Exercise Goes a Long Way

With exercise, even a little can go a long way. In addition to the many physical benefits it provides, working out also give a whole host of mood boosts.

The mood-boosting quality of exercise is primarily due to the release of endorphins, dopamine, adrenaline, and endocannabinoids, which all contribute to increased feelings of confidence and decreased levels of stress and depression.<sup>7</sup>

It doesn't have to take a lot of time to get these benefits, either. In fact, according to one study, it may only take 15 minutes of running a day to decrease the risk of depression by over 25%.<sup>8</sup>

Life can come with a lot of stress, so it's important to recognize you have the ability to influence your mood for the better. Try implementing these four simple steps over the next month and see the difference they can make!

<sup>1</sup>Schulz, Marc; Waldinger, Robert. "An 85-year Harvard study found the No. 1 thing that makes us happy in life: It helps us 'live longer.'" *CNBC*, 2023

<sup>2</sup>Gardiner, Alistair. "5 evidence-based paths to happiness." *MDLinx*, 2021

<sup>3</sup>Santos, Laurie. "Laurie Santos, Yale Happiness Professor, on 5 Things That Will Make You Happier." *Newsweek*, 2020

<sup>4</sup>P., Gene. "Benefits of Gratitude: 31 Powerful Reasons to be More Grateful." *Happier Human*, 2023

<sup>5</sup>"Giving thanks can make you happier." *Harvard Medical School*, 2021

<sup>6</sup>Kane, Ryan. "Does Meditation Make You Happier? (Here's What Meditation And Happiness Research Says)." *Mindfulness Box*, 2023

<sup>7</sup>Livingston, Mercey. "Need Motivation? 4 Unexpected Benefits for Your Happiness." *CNET*, 2023

<sup>8</sup>"More evidence that exercise can boost mood." *Harvard Medical School*, 2019

