

# Simple psychological tips to help you live a happier life

Happiness leads to stability and higher productivity, both of which lead to more happiness. You can use your own mind to trick yourself into being happier.

It's easy to see why happiness is such a big challenge these days. People are working jobs they hate, struggling to pay their bills, and living in an increasingly isolated, digitally driven world. And that lack of happiness has real consequences beyond just feeling sad: When you're unhappy, you're less productive and less stable, and that feeling of helplessness can quickly become a vicious cycle that's hard to escape.



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There are steps you can take to get out of this rut. Some of them are physical—getting out in nature more, exercising more, or interacting with people in person—but you also have the most powerful happiness machine in the universe inside your head. **You can use your own mind to trick yourself into being happier—though it's important to note that while these tips can help anyone reset their perspective and boost their mood, they're not a substitute for formal therapy or medication.**

## Pay attention to what you like

Feeling depressed can be a vicious cycle: You feel sad or unmotivated, so you skip activities that make you happy. Your friends invite you out, but you're not in the mood, so you stay home. You have a day off, but you feel too lazy to engage in hobbies that bring you joy. When trying to break that cycle, we tend to focus on

eliminating the negative. Instead, you should try to increase the positive.

Studies have shown that you can think of happiness as a muscle. A strategy called ' *reward sensitivity* ' involves actively noticing positive emotions and taking time to enjoy them. If something makes you happy, even momentarily, take a moment to note and catalog that feeling. Then seek it out again. Being aware of what brings you joy and pushing yourself to relive that experience can train you to be happier.

## **Use the "behavioral activation" technique**

Research has shown that a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) technique called behavioral activation can help us feel happier. Depression and unhappiness can often become a vicious cycle—we stop doing the things that make us happy because we're depressed. This can manifest as avoidance: If running is a great mood booster, you find reasons why you can't run right now—it's too hot, you don't have the right clothes, you don't have enough time to run your usual route. Avoiding that enjoyable behavior makes you even unhappier, which leads to a repeat of the depressive episode.

Behavioral activation is a technique that requires you to do these pleasurable activities even when you don't feel like it. You may not feel like running (or doing laundry, or engaging in hobbies), but simply engaging in the behavior consistently will improve your mood. If you start scheduling activities that bring you joy, you can "train" your mind to actually be happier.



## **Challenge your critical thoughts**

We often fall into depression because we repeat negative messages about and to ourselves. If we constantly criticize ourselves, it begins to feel like the natural state of things. One trick that can work wonders is to challenge that negative view by forcing yourself to defend your position—a process known as Socratic Questioning.

If your stance is that you are bad and will never get what you want in life, challenge those thoughts by asking yourself what facts support your perception, how others might perceive you, and how you would react if someone else said they felt the same way. By challenging and questioning your negative thoughts, you can

remove some of their influence.

## Use the "One Minute Rule"

For a quick mood boost, try the One Minute Rule: Identify tasks and chores that you can complete in a minute or less. These should be simple tasks, like putting something away, responding to a text message, or packing up an item to return. Because these tasks are completed quickly, they don't take as much effort to do—but the feeling of accomplishment is often the same as with larger, more complex tasks.

By practicing the One Minute Rule multiple times a day, you'll train yourself to experience that sense of accomplishment and internalize its positive effects. Plus, the effects of the rule are tangible—you'll notice a cleaner desk, a more organized inbox, and a more organized life.

## Practice compassion

Compassion—feeling the suffering of others and seeking to help—can be learned. Studies have shown that people who 'practice compassion' toward others are happier—and more resilient. There's also evidence that turning inward and practicing self-compassion has a direct relationship with your happiness. While it may seem silly at first, writing yourself a note or speaking to yourself in a supportive speech as if you were talking to your best friend can have a real and powerful impact on your emotional state. Practicing self-compassion can also include treating yourself, doing small acts of kindness.



Feeling unhappy and depressed often leads to self-criticism, constantly criticizing ourselves for our shortcomings. Reversing that scenario and constantly reminding ourselves of how great we really are will help recalibrate our thinking, leading to more happiness.

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