

HAPPY ALL DAY

Simple Daily Practices for a Happier Life

by Judith Fertig



Throughout the past decade, success researchers and positive psychologists have sketched out in broad strokes the big picture of our elemental yearning for happiness. According to Martin Seligman, Ph.D., and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, inner happiness derives from four basic elements: positive emotion, relationships, meaning in life and accomplishment. What we want to know now is how to instill happiness into daily practices.

In her latest book, *Better Than Before: Mastering The Habits Of Our Everyday Lives*, happiness expert Gretchen Rubin fleshes out the needed details. She maintains that the shift into a happier way of being can be as simple as changing our habits, which she terms the invisible architecture of daily life. Rubin found, “We repeat about 40 percent of our behavior almost daily, so our habits shape our existence and our future. If we change our habits, we change our lives.”

We can start small in sometimes surprising ways that encourage personal, family, workplace and community well-being.

Simplify, Exercise, Meditate

Israeli-born Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D., a former Harvard lecturer and author of the bestselling *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*, had 854 students enroll in one of his pioneering classes on happiness in 2006, the highest enrollment for any class at the time. “Students explored ways to apply these ideas to their life experiences and communities,” he says. Today, he lectures and consults worldwide on the science of happiness, or “optimal being and functioning.”

Ben-Shahar suggests we cultivate three personal habits. The first one is to simplify, saying, “We need to turn off our phones, email and other distractions at home, so we can fully be with the people we care about and that care about us. Time affluence—time to enjoy and appreciate—is a predictor of happiness.” The second is to exercise.

“We were not meant to be sedentary,” he says. The third is to meditate. “Meditating helps us to develop extreme resilience to negative emotion.”

Ken A. Verni, Psy.D., a clinical psychologist in Highland Park, New Jersey, endorses the importance of a mindfulness habit. In his new book, *Happiness the Mindful Way: A Practical Guide*, Verni outlines easy, step-by-step actions to form a new happiness habit that concurrently reduces stress and increases enlightenment. He starts with what he calls “compassionate attention,” i.e., being fully awake or present in our lives without judging what we are thinking. When we view our thoughts as events in the mind, he says, conscious self-observation introduces a space between our perceptions and responses, allowing us to view our thoughts as separate from the person we really are.

Complementary methods may include breathing techniques or body awareness that help shift us away from anxious, “What if?” speculations into the ever-present now. With just a few minutes of mindfulness a day—the first thing in the morning or at night before

retiring—according to Verni, “We can shift our relationship to ourselves and our life experiences in a way that allows for greater spaciousness, acceptance and compassion, and in doing so, can dramatically improve the quality of our lives.”

Daily Joy at Home

Another way to improve the quality of our life is to reverse one habit. Shonda Rhimes, creator of TV dramas that include *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Scandal*, admits that she’s a driven, Type-A person in her new book, *Year of Yes*. A busy career in Los Angeles, three children and little leisure left her feeling unhappy, so instead of reciting her habitual, “No” to anything extraneous—like parties, eating chocolate chip cookies or spending a lazy afternoon chatting with an old friend—she decided to change that habit to, “Yes.”

One of Rhimes’ most profound revelations occurred after she responded positively when her children

Take the Secret Society of Happy People’s personal happiness inventory at Tinyurl.com/HappinessCheck

Tinyurl.com/DefiningOurHappiness provides an introduction.

asked her to play. She observes that kids don’t want that much from us and playtime rarely involves more than 15 minutes; when we give them access and attention, it makes everyone feel good.

Rubin agrees that it’s the little things that can contribute to family happiness. As a New York City mother of two, she decided that she’d be happier if she knew she was creating family memories. She started regularly preparing “special occasion” family breakfasts, a relatively easy meal to customize. She says, “Studies show that family traditions support children’s social

development and strengthen family cohesiveness. They provide the connection and predictability that people crave. I know that I enjoy a holiday more when I know exactly what we’re going to do and when we’re going to do it.”

Home for Matthieu Ricard, a biochemist turned Buddhist monk, could be a Nepalese monastery or a seat at scientific conferences around the world. As the author of *Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life’s Most Important Skill*, he defines happiness as a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind.

11 HABITS OF THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE

by Kristi Ling

Happy people don’t find happiness like you’d find a penny on the ground; they make it happen, with action. Cultivating happiness habits can make a marked difference in your life.

- ✓ **Be deliberately optimistic.** Optimism is imperative to emotional wellness.
- ✓ **Prioritize mindfully.** Consistently align choices, intentions and actions with the top priorities of love, happiness and health.
- ✓ **Keep uplifting resources on hand.** A few surefire mood-lifters may include a green smoothie, mani-pedi and solo dance party to at least one get-your-feet-moving song by a favorite artist.
- ✓ **Put yourself first.** It’s the best way to bring your ‘A’-game to everyone else.

- ✓ **Be a prolific seeker.** Seek beauty, joy, adventure, pleasure, growth and powerful meaning in all areas of life. Let life move you to possibility, opportunity and gratitude.
- ✓ **Don’t make things personal.** Absolutely nothing others say or do is about you, ever.
- ✓ **Examine the worst that can happen.** Many of the limitations you’re placing on yourself aren’t



real—they’re illusions.

- ✓ **Practice loving-kindness.** Making this a habit changes the vibration of your life and the lives of those around you. Plus it feels great.
- ✓ **Be aware of your energy.** Tune in to surrounding energy, as well as the energy you’re emitting and notice what needs to be adjusted or abandoned.
- ✓ **Be wary of media consumption.** Limit messages in everything from email and news to books and music that take you away from the calm, open space within that revels in joy and wonder. Conversations count, too.

Kristi Ling is the author of Operation Happiness: The 3-Step Plan to Creating a Life of Lasting Joy, Abundant Energy, and Radical Bliss. The life and business coach shares more at KristiLing.com/operationhappinessresources.



HAPPIER IN JUST MINUTES

- ✓ Journaling for two minutes about one positive experience we've had over the past 24 hours allows our brain to relive it.
- ✓ Exercising, including 15 minutes of cardiovascular action a day, teaches our brain that our behavior matters and improves our mood.
- ✓ Meditating for even a few minutes at a time relieves an overloaded brain and allows it to focus on one thing at a time.
- ✓ Writing one quick email in the morning praising or thanking someone we work with or just to make them happy will make us feel a sense of social support, a great predictor of happiness.

Source: *The Happiness Advantage*, by Shawn Achor

"It's not a mere pleasurable feeling, a fleeting emotion or a mood, but an optimal state of being," he says.

In order to nurture it, Ricard recommends taking some time each day for quiet reflection, noting, "The contemplative approach consists of rising above the whirlpool of our thoughts for a moment and looking calmly within, as if at an interior landscape, to find the embodiment of our deepest aspirations." By cultivating attention and mindfulness, the cares of everyday life become less burdensome. Such a spiritual practice of just sitting quietly for 10 minutes a day, observing the thoughts that randomly cross our minds, and then gently shooing them away, can be enormously beneficial, he says, as it helps us put things in perspective and aim for continuous calm.

Flipping the Switch

Changing thought habits to focus on the good things in life is an approach that works for clients of Mary Lynn Ziemer, a life coach in Estero, Florida. Ziemer suggests we "flip the switch" from negative thinking and make a habit of starting our day being positive and grateful for 10 minutes. She recommends we start by doing deep breathing—four seconds breathing in,

hold for seven seconds, eight seconds breathing out—repeated four times. Next, we ask ourselves how we feel in the moment and identify the emotion, and then ask what thoughts we can think to feel better.

The last step of the exercise is to frame a positive outlook in an affirmation, such as, "I am so grateful that I know I am doing the best I can and everything will work out. Everything is fine." Ziemer adds, "Remember that happiness comes from love and takes you to a place of peace and calm. It is such emotions that beget success in relationships, health, supply, and clear purpose. Plus, it benefits everyone around you."

Happiness Habits at Work

Dallas happiness researcher Shawn Achor, founder of Goodthink, Inc., and author of *The Happiness Advantage*, applies the science of happiness to the workplace. His research echoes the personal positivity of Ziemer, Verni and Ben-Shahar's approaches to nurturing happiness. "Happiness is such an incredible advantage in our lives," says Achor. "When the human brain is positive, our intelligence rises and we stop diverting resources to think about anxiety." The *Harvard Business Review* published his research results: "Creativity triples and

Habits are like financial capital—forming one today is an investment that will automatically give out returns for years to come.

—Shawn Achor

productive energy rises by 31 percent. Sales rise by 37 percent and the likelihood of promotion rises by 40 percent.”

Achor’s method is helping people rewrite the way they think by first looking for positives at work. Workers write down three highly specific, positive things about their workday for 21 consecutive days. Rather than just, “I love my job,” acknowledge, “I love my job because I get to help people every day.” Or, “I love my morning tea because it gets me going.” Achor reports that at the end of the period, “Their brain starts to retain a pattern of scanning the world not for the negative, but for the positive first.”

Taking a work break for two minutes of mindfulness is also effective. “We did this at Google,” he says. “We had employees take their hands off their keyboards for two minutes a day to go from multitasking to simply focusing on their breathing. This drops their stress levels and raises accuracy rates. It improves levels of happiness

and it takes just minutes.”

Happiness in the Community

We can foster happiness habits at home, at work and in the community. Rubin suggests starting such a group, akin to a self-help book club or bridge group, but with extra benefits. She even offers a free starter kit for those that want to try it, available via GretchenRubin.com/habits/start-a-habits-group.

In addition to the happy exchange of ideas and success stories, happiness habits group members also have the benefit of being accountable to each other. Others can help us continue to color in the details supporting and forwarding the broad brushstrokes of positive emotions, relationships, meaning in life and accomplishments in a down-to-earth, fun way.

Judith Fertig blogs at AlfrescoFoodAndLifestyle.blogspot.com from Overland Park, KS.



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