Increasing Happiness

Happiness is what most people want. Surveys that have asked, "what do want for **yourself** and **those you love**?" the most common response is, "**I** want to be happy!" and "I want **them** to be happy!"

So how do we cultivate happiness? The following are several simple technique that you can easily learn and start practicing today!

START INCREASING YOUR HAPPINESS TODAY by choosing one or more of the following five daily techniques and notice how it affects your life in a positive way…

___ Gratitude Journal
___ Laughter Yoga, "Very Good Very Good Yay!!"
___ Loving-kindness meditation
___ Repeating happiness sayings or Mantras
___ Happiness Reminders: bracelets, pictures, hand positions

Note: Sometimes it helps to do a relaxation activity or technique first. Ask for our handouts on stress management or look for them on our website: http://srfmr.org/fellowship_links.php

Gratitude Journal

An easy way to start cultivating happiness is to keep a **Gratitude Journal** to help you to focus on **Joy** in your daily life. As your gratitude lists gets longer it becomes more valuable.

Research shows that keeping gratitude journals improves immune system function, reduces depression, and helps to create emotional stability and openness. Many people who start gratitude journals will find so much benefit they won't want to stop - the shift to living from a place of gratitude is a huge benefit!

Instructions: Using your day planner, a journal, or even a computer, set aside a few minutes a day before bed to jot down 3-4 things for which you are grateful. Write as much or as little as you like.

Start your gratitude journal right now! What are 3 things you are grateful for today?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Loving kindness meditation

This is an ancient technique that is probably over 2,500 years old. It is a simple, but powerful way to shift your emotional and physical state very quickly from "stressed" to a state of being "at peace and loving".

Step 1: Begin with five abdominal breaths.

- Place one hand on your chest, the other on your belly. Breathing in, the hand on the abdomen should rise higher than the chest as the diaphragm expands, pulling air into the lung bases.
- Take a **slow deep breath in** through your nose. Imagine sucking in <u>all the air</u> in the room and hold it for a count of 7 (or as long as you are able, not exceeding 7)
- Exhale through your mouth for a count of 6-8. Exhale **twice as long** as inhalation.
- Repeat the cycle four more times for a total of 5 deep breaths.
- Try to reduce your breathing rate to **6 breaths per minute** (one breath every 10 seconds)

Step 2: Then direct the Loving-Kindness Meditation to yourself...
May I be filled with loving-kindness / May I be well / May I be peaceful and at ease / May I be happy

Step 3: Then direct it towards someone/something that causing you discomfort or negative emotions...
May you be filled with lovingkindness/May you be well/May you be peaceful & at ease /May you be happy

Step 4: Finish with 5 more deep abdominal breaths.

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Happiness Reminders: bracelets, pictures, hand positions

Think of a place or thing you look at every day, perhaps the visor/dash of your car, the refrigerator, by the toilet, your date book, near your desk, your body/wrists/hands… now find pictures, statues, or sayings that remind you of what you want to remember. This could be reminders of the people you love, the places you feel whole, a saying that rings with the truth, or if you put on a bracelet or something on your body that reminds you of something or someone wonderful.
Reminder object(s): _____ Location(s): _____

Another way to do this is to associate certain postures with happiness. Hand positions, posture, or how you breathe can all be used to program repeated good feelings. Play with it and have fun!

Laughter Yoga, "Very Good Very Good Yay!"

Laughter yoga is a form of yoga that uses a variety of exercises for individuals and groups to force physical laughter, which then turns into real/contagious laughter. The concept is based on the scientific observation that the body can't tell the difference between real or forced laguther – both provide the same healthful benefits! Twenty minutes of laughter a day is sufficient to develop full physiological benefits.

To start: Look in the mirror, or at the other people in your group, and start chanting **"Very good (clap), very good (clap), yay (hands up triumphantly)!"** Another way to do this exercise is to say something positive you've done today/this week for your health or happiness, then you or the rest of the group chants "Very good, very good, yay!" The accomplishment can be as little or big as you want – the important thing is to practice positive thoughts and cheering yourself on.

Repeating happiness sayings or Mantras

Simply repeating a word or expression regularly can not only relax you, but can remind you of what is important to you, help you steer your mind in a direction you want, and enjoy your moment more fully. Yes, it sounds too easy to be true, but it works! There are 2 basic parts:

1. Something to help focus: watching the breath and/or repeating a word, phrase, prayer or sound.
2. A relaxed way to return to this if and when your mind wanders.

General Instructions:

Sit. Close your eyes, relax for a moment and breath deeply. When it feels right, begin thinking your mantra or focus phrase silently to yourself. Coordinate with your breathing or let the pace, volume, and intonation of the mantra vary in whatever way feels most comfortable for you. Whenever your mind wanders, gently return to your focus, without criticizing yourself for the lapse.
Don't try for a particular spiritual effect when you meditate. Meditation is about being, not doing; letting, not willing. Put aside your tendency to judge; the only "bad" meditation is the one you didn't do.

Sample Mantras/Focus Phrases:

- Breathing in *I smile*, breathing out *I relax*.
- In 1 out 1, in 2 out 2, in 3 out 3, etc. – counting the breath
- I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful.
- Breathing in/out, I am making my body calm and at peace.
- Words: Peace, Calm, In/Out, Smile/Release, Present moment/Wonderful moment, One, Let go
- Religious: Lord/have mercy, Hail Mary, Shalom (Peace), Shanti (Peace), Maranatha