

# The science of happiness: Unlocking the secrets to a fulfilling life

Happiness is a lifelong quest. It is a state of mind, a state of satisfaction and contentment and it is subjective. While it is impossible to be happy at all times, a combination of intentional practice and mindful habits can steer people in the direction of long-term satisfaction and happiness. So, below, we list some steps to be taken for a happier life.

## Eat a healthy diet

Our body and mind are intricately intertwined. So, taking care of our physical health can boost our moods and take us a long way on the road to happiness.

Prioritising a balanced, nutrition-dense diet consisting of all macro and micronutrients, can greatly lift moods and raise the bar of happiness. Junk food and sugar-laced food release the feel-good hormone serotonin. This burst of serotonin is temporary and you will feel let down quickly once it wears off.

Instead, opt for foods with complex carbohydrates, dietary fibre, and protein. Protein releases dopamine and norepinephrine, which boost energy and concentration. Complex carbohydrates will slowly release glucose in the bloodstream, making you feel fuller for a longer time. Dietary fibre will support the health of the gut microbiome which produces 80 per cent of the body's serotonin.

## Get plenty of sleep

Modern society vastly underestimates the importance of sleep. As adults, getting 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep is key to feeling well and energised. A study by the BPS Reader's Digest concluded that a dearth of sleep increases our sensitivity towards negative emotions.

To improve the quality of sleep, invest in good quality mattresses, comfortable pillows and sheets, block out light sources at night, avoid having a TV in the bedroom, and refrain from using gadgets before sleeping. Reserve the hour before



sleeping for a quiet time such as reading or meditation. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day including weekends, and keep your bedroom dark, cool, and quiet.

## Exercise

Exercise has profound effects on our mental health. It is an effective strategy for overcoming depression. Exercise can help you relax, increase your brainpower, and release endorphins. Even a small amount of physical activity performed consistently can improve the quality of life.

Exercise can range from walking, yoga, light stretching, and jogging, to gyms. Be careful not to start with a strenuous routine as it can demotivate you and throw you off the good habit.

## Avoid comparing yourself with others

Comparison is the thief of joy. All of us have varying life trajectories and unique journeys. So, it is very important to stop comparing ourselves to others and their lives. Comparison will only lead to higher stress, anxiety, unnecessary worrying about things, not in our control, obsessive thinking and a general let-down of our mood.

One step to take to reduce this tendency of comparison is to unfollow any kind of content that generates discomfort and a sense of inferiority complex in you. There is absolutely no need to hate watch or consume content with feelings of despair and negative attitudes. By clicking that

unfollow/hide button, you will save yourself mentally and make mundane tasks like scrolling apps more intentional.

## Count your blessings

Having gratitude is key to bringing long-term happiness. Start your day by being grateful for one good thing in life. Try to appreciate the good things that happen every day, whether it is small or big or lacks salience. Keep a gratitude journal where you can list three things you were grateful



for at the end of each day. Such practices serve as gentle reminders to your psyche that life is not as bad as it might feel on some days.

## Practice being present and mindfulness

Being stuck in the past and worrying about the future can often lead us to forget about the present. It is significant that we concentrate on the present. Breathing exercises and meditation can centre and ground you. Avoid the myth of multitasking. The latest neuroscientific research has proven that our minds cannot do more than one thing at a time. What we recognise as multitasking is just jumping between tasks, making us less effective at all of them. So, centre all your attention on the one task at hand at a time.

## Invest in your relationships

As social beings, it should come as no surprise that social relationships and

companionships bring people the most joy and pleasure in life. Be present in your relationships and value the people in your lives by acknowledging and praising their impact on you. Spend quality time with your loved ones. Do not be afraid to make new friends and acquaintances, and join clubs, groups and volunteer organisations to connect with like-minded people.

## Be generous

It may sound counterintuitive but helping others to be happy is a source of personal happiness. By giving others time, effort and money, we can build communities. Acts of kindness have ripple effects. These services do not have to be grand; they can be as simple as holding the door for a stranger, smiling when speaking to people, genuinely complimenting someone and many more. Practice being happy for others and celebrating the success of others. Try being a good listener.

## Other habits

Among the many habits having the power to improve your happiness, some include decluttering and getting rid of things you do not need, setting boundaries in relationships, being optimistic, practising time management, managing stress, working towards work-life balance, spending time outside, preferably in verdant nature, being forgiving and empathetic, ditching and unplugging from smartphones and social media, exploring new hobbies and interests without the pressure to perform well in them, etc.

All of these habits can be incorporated into your lifestyle today, but be careful not to start everything at once. Start slow, with simpler habits but remain consistent with them all.

By Maliha Arosha Hasan  
Photo: Collected





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