

10 HABITS TO IMPROVE HAPPINESS AND REDUCE ANXIETY



HABIT #1: EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Did you know focusing on gratitude on a regular basis can rewire your brain for happiness? It produces higher levels of dopamine and serotonin, which lead to feelings of bliss. **It also reduces stress and anxiety.**

I realize feeling grateful might be a little challenging at times, especially with all the unpredictability and negativity in the world. But if you focus on what's going right, you'll find a lot more to be grateful for because what you focus on expands.

Plus, when you're in a state of appreciation, it raises your vibration, making you a magnet for joy and abundance. You energetically get back what you put out into the Universe, so if you're putting out feelings of gratitude, you will see more things to be grateful for in your life. For example, if you want more financial abundance, start appreciating the abundance you already have.

Try to make expressing gratitude a daily habit. Every morning before you get out of bed, think of at least three things you're grateful for. You might even consider keeping a journal to reflect on what you're grateful for at the end of each day.

Even simple pleasures can bring joy, like taking a walk with a friend, enjoying a cup of pumpkin spice coffee, or snuggling with your pet.

If you're skeptical about the life-changing benefits, try it for one week. What have you got to lose?

HABIT #2: HEALTHY DIET (MOST OF THE TIME)

We try to find ways to cope with negative emotions – some healthy and some...not so much. While it's normal to turn to food and/or alcohol during these emotional times, it's a temporary "fix" that ends up making you feel worse if you overdo it.

If you find yourself reaching for your go-to unhealthy coping mechanism, I encourage you to pause and ask yourself what you're feeling. You might be feeling stressed, sad, angry, bored, or indulging out of pure habit.

When you understand your triggers, it's easier to take control of your reactions to them. Then you can redirect your energy, like going for a walk, calling a friend, or reading a book. If you find it's becoming a habit, removing your go-to indulgences from the house will make it a whole lot easier. (Out of sight, out of mind.)

You might also keep a food journal so you're more aware of your eating patterns and emotional triggers. Try not to beat yourself up if you do overindulge. It's a normal human response. Give yourself grace and send love to that part of you that needs it. Plus, it's not realistic to be healthy all the time. Life is meant to be enjoyed.

When you follow a healthy diet (most of the time), you not only have a healthier body, which helps you feel better about yourself, but you also have a better chance of getting your essential nutrients, contributing to your emotional well-being, energy, and brain power.

Try reducing or eliminating processed, junk, fast foods, and added sugars from your diet, and incorporate healthier, whole foods. Eat a rainbow of different colored fruits and vegetables to help you get your essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Do your best to eat organic as much as possible.

Incorporate mood-boosting and anxiety-reducing foods as well, such as green tea, blueberries, spinach, cantaloupe, carrots, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, sunflower seeds, lentils, lima beans, asparagus, and dark chocolate. If you struggle with anxiety, consider moderating or eliminating caffeine, as it may make anxiety feel more intense.

Drink lots of water throughout the day. When you don't get enough water, it can zap your energy, which increases sugar and carb cravings because your body is trying to find a quick energy boost. Plus, when you're dehydrated, it's easy to confuse thirst for hunger.

HABIT #3: EXERCISE (AT LEAST 10 MINUTES A DAY)

There are many health benefits of exercise. In addition to improving physical health, metabolism, confidence, energy levels, brain function, and restful sleep, it's also been proven to help with emotional well-being.

When you exercise, your body releases endorphins, which enhance the feeling of optimism. It also suppresses hormones like cortisol that cause stress and anxiety. In fact, even just 10 minutes a day of aerobic activity has been shown to reduce the severity of anxiety.

If you make exercise a habit, it'll be a lot easier to stick to it. If you do something consistently for roughly two months (66 days to be exact), you'll have formed a new habit. It takes determination and self-discipline to do something with that much consistency, but if you have a strong desire, align your mind to the goal, create a plan, and believe in yourself, action will follow.

For optimum benefits, try to work out at least 30 minutes a day, 3-6 days a week. Find something you enjoy so you're more likely to stick with it, like walking, hiking, biking, swimming, pickleball, volleyball, skiing, snowshoeing, group fitness classes, etc...I've been doing the [online BODi workouts](#) for about five years now and absolutely love them. Autumn Calabrese's classes are my favorite. I feel like she's my own personal trainer.

HABIT #4: GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep every night. It's essential for our health. It gives our bodies time to repair themselves and allows our brains time to process information better.

Lack of sleep can weaken the immune system, increase irritability, worsen anxiety, and lower levels of concentration and productivity. It can even cause or worsen symptoms of depression. Plus, like I mentioned earlier, when you're tired, you crave sugar and carbs because your body is seeking that immediate energy boost.

Here are some ideas to help you get enough rest:

- Get on a regular sleep schedule to maintain your body's internal clock.
- Keep the room temperature on the cooler side, between 60 - 67°F.
- Limit or eliminate alcohol and caffeine before bed, as they can disrupt sleep.
- Turn off bright lights at least one hour before bed.
- Take a warm bath with lavender to help soothe and relax you.
- Limit electronics and activities that might over-stimulate the brain.
- Try journaling before bed. Problems tend to seem more intense at night. If you're worried about something, write it down, ask for clarity from above (if that resonates with you) and tackle the issue in the morning. It won't seem nearly as daunting then, and you may have gained some clarity overnight.
- Silence your phone, turn it over, and read a [book](#) that's not overly stimulating.
- Focus on the [OM sound](#) to help turn off the monkey mind. This really helps me.

HABIT #5: MEDITATE

Every day, we ask others, "How are you?" but we don't often ask that of ourselves. Meditation is one way to do that. It helps you check in and listen to the voice of your higher self (your true self), which has all the answers.

To understand the power of meditation, I want you to picture a lake filled with wakes after several high-speed boats have passed through. (The wakes are like your thoughts.) Meditation is the calming of the lake. It becomes completely still – like glass. Now, when you introduce a new, high-energy thought, it's like a stone being skimmed across the lake. The effect is much more powerful and noticeable.

The many benefits of meditation:

- **Reduces worry:** Meditation helps keep you in the present moment, taking the focus off self-referential thoughts, making it easier to get out of your head worrying about the future or feeling bad about the past. When you're in between thoughts (in the gap), there are no worries.
- **It makes it easier to improve your mindset:** If you're in a state of fear, shame, sadness, or any other low-energy emotion, meditation is even more important. Because it stops thought, it's much easier to go from no thought to a happier thought than to go from a negative thought to a positive one.
- **Lowers anxiety and depression:** A team of Harvard scientists discovered that meditation can rewire your brain to help reduce anxiety and depression. (They found active meditators had a reduction in the size of their amygdala, which is the part of the brain responsible for fear, anxiety, and stress.)
- **It improves brain function.** It just takes a couple of weeks of meditation to see the benefits of improved focus and memory. And according to a UCLA study, long-term meditators had better-preserved brains.

Here's a simple guide on how to meditate:

- Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit. It doesn't really matter where it is as long as you're comfortable and can stay in that position for a while.
- Set a timer (if needed) for at least 10 minutes and either sit in silence, use an online [YouTube meditation](#), or try an app like [Calm](#) or [Headspace](#).
- Focus on the sensation of your breath as it goes in and out.
- Notice when your mind has wandered. This is going to happen. Try not to judge it. Meditation can be challenging, especially when you're first starting off. When your mind wanders, gently guide your attention back to your breath.

- When you've completed the meditation, introduce a high-energy thought like one of your intentions. Then check in and see how you're feeling. Pay attention to any thoughts, intuitive nudges, and emotions that come up for you. That's all it takes.

Let me ask you something: if you believed setting aside just 5-10 minutes a day for 30 days could improve your life, wouldn't you want to try it?

HABIT #6: SPEND TIME IN NATURE

Getting out in nature is one of the best therapies you can find. Studies have found it helps reduce stress, depression, anxiety, and even blood pressure. It also improves our energy and immune systems.

Plus, you can get your vitamin D in its most natural form. (It's estimated that more than 40% of American adults are deficient in Vitamin D.) A deficiency in "the sunshine vitamin" has been linked to depression.

It doesn't take long to reap the benefits. **Researchers found that spending just five minutes in nature can boost mood and self-esteem.**

I know when I'm in the mountains surrounded by trees, I feel not only more connected to myself but to Source energy as well. It also gets me out of my head, in appreciation mode, and in a place of inspiration.

Take at least five minutes out of your day to get outside and take in the beauty around you.

HABIT #7: MAKE TIME FOR WHAT YOU ENJOY

Every day, we're bombarded with things we have to do – going to work, taking care of the kids, laundry, groceries...The list goes on and on. The things you have to do aren't going anywhere, but what about the things that bring you joy? Giving back to others is challenging if you haven't taken the time to give back to yourself.

Having a hobby or something to look forward to has been shown to boost motivation and productivity, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase levels of happiness. Plus, when

you're focused on something you enjoy, it takes your mind off your worries and negative thought loops.

What is something you enjoy? When do you have moments of ecstatic engagement where you lose track of time? What makes you feel like you're playing like you did as a child? What do you love doing in your spare time?

It's essential to make yourself a priority. Make a list of activities you enjoy, like taking a pottery class, painting, drawing, dancing, relaxing with a good book, or watching your favorite show. Life is more rewarding when you have something to look forward to.

What if you set aside at least one hour a week to do something that makes you happy? Aren't you worth it?

HABIT #8: CONNECT WITH OTHERS

We need connection to thrive emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. **Connecting to a tribe of people who support and lift you up is important for your happiness. The relationships you build can increase your feelings of self-esteem and belonging and lower levels of anxiety and depression.** Plus, talking to your support system during times of stress puts problems into perspective and lets you know you're not alone.

Try to surround yourself with supportive, positive people who make you feel good in their presence. People who share in your victories and support you toward your goals. They should accept you the way you are but also encourage and challenge you in positive ways.

I recognize making these kinds of connections isn't always easy. If you're feeling lonely, what action can you take to meet some new people? Join a meetup group? Take a class on something that interests you? Volunteer at your local shelter? Join a sports team? Take your dog to the same local park? Take a group fitness class at the gym? Join a book club? There are so many ways you can meet new people if you put yourself out there.

Carve out quality time for the people you care about. Is there a relationship you want to improve upon? What can you do to nurture that relationship? For every person you interact with, find something positive about them. Ask questions, be a good listener, talk about things that interest them, find commonalities, share stories about your life, and remember facts about theirs. It will strengthen your connection.

"True Connection is when you're seen, heard, and valued." – Brené Brown

HABIT #9: SHIFT NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

As I'm sure you're painfully aware, we have thousands of thoughts going through our minds every single day, usually thinking the same thoughts over and over. Unfortunately, not all our thoughts are very kind, or true for that matter.

When we let negative thinking take over, we can get trapped in these negative thought loops, which adds to our stress and anxiety.

"A belief is only a thought that you keep thinking." – Abraham-Hicks

Mel Robbins calls it the "what if" loop. We start future tripping and worrying about things like, *"What if I fail? What if I say the wrong thing? What if I make a fool out of myself? What if they judge me? What if they don't like me?"*

When we doubt ourselves, our actions reflect our thoughts, which can manifest into self-defeating behaviors.

Mel challenges us to interrupt and stop that "what if" loop as soon as it starts. What if, instead of worrying, we asked ourselves, "What if it all works out?" The circumstances stay the same, but now you have a much better way to handle the situation.

Get into the habit of stopping yourself when you get caught in the "what if" loop and turn it around to, *"What if this works out for me?"* Then, start focusing on the solutions you want to see.

HABIT #10: PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, it's easy to overlook our own needs. **Practicing self-compassion is a powerful force that can significantly impact your mental health, resilience, and overall life satisfaction.** Here are some ways to do that:

- **Embrace your imperfections:** Life can be challenging, and no one is immune to setbacks or moments of vulnerability. Self-compassion involves recognizing your flaws and mistakes without harsh self-judgment. Everyone has flaws, and everyone makes mistakes. We're all a work in progress. **Instead of dwelling on perceived shortcomings, embrace imperfection as a natural part of life.** This mindset shift allows you to navigate life's twists and turns more resiliently.

- **Treat yourself as your own best friend:** Rather than succumbing to self-criticism during challenging times, treat yourself with the same warmth and care you would a best friend. **Research indicates that self-compassion can mitigate the adverse effects of stress, reducing cortisol levels and promoting emotional well-being.**

By extending understanding and support to yourself, you create a buffer against the harsh impact of life's stressors. **When you make a mistake or find yourself dealing with a challenging situation, ask yourself what advice you would give your best friend if they came to you with the same problem you're experiencing.**

Disclaimer: All information and resources in this handout are intended to motivate readers to make their own nutrition, physical, and mental health decisions in collaboration with their healthcare provider(s). I am not a doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, or therapist, and therefore, do not offer professional advice. I encourage you to consult a doctor before making significant health changes, especially those related to a specific diagnosis or condition. The information in this handout is not intended as medical advice or therapy.