

Self-acceptance could be the key to a happier life

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Happiness is more than just a feeling; it is something we can all practise on a daily basis. But people are better at some 'happy habits' than others. In fact, the one habit that corresponds most closely with us being satisfied with our lives overall – self-acceptance – is often the one we practise least.

5,000 people surveyed by the charity Action for Happiness, in collaboration with Do Something Different, rated themselves between 1 and 10 on ten habits identified from the latest scientific research as being key to [happiness](#).

Giving was the top habit revealed by those who took the survey. When asked about Giving (How often do you make an effort to help or be kind to others?) people scored an average of 7.41 out of 10, with one in six (17%) topping 10 out of 10. Just over one in three (36%) people scored

8 or 9; slightly fewer (32%) scored 6 or 7; and less than one in six (15%) rated themselves at 5 or less.

The Relating habit came a close second. The question How often do you put effort into the relationships that matter most to you? produced an average score of 7.36 out of 10. And 15% of people scored the maximum 10 out of 10.

The survey also revealed which habits are most closely related to people's overall satisfaction with life. All 10 habits were found to be strongly linked to life satisfaction, with Acceptance found to be the habit that predicts it most strongly. Yet Acceptance was also revealed as the habit that people tend to practise the least, generating the lowest average score from the 5,000 respondents.

When answering the Acceptance question, How often are you kind to yourself and think you're fine as you are? people's average rating was just 5.56 out of 10. Only 5% of people put themselves at a 10 on the Acceptance habit. Around one in five people (19%) scored an 8 or 9; Less than a third (30%) scored a 6 or 7; and almost half (46%) of people rated themselves at 5 or less.

Treating our bodies to regular physical activity is another proven happy habit. Yet the survey revealed that this is another habit that often gets overlooked. The average answer to How often do you spend at least half an hour a day being active? was just 5.88 out of 10, with 45% of people rating themselves 5 or less.

Professor Karen Pine, a psychologist from the University of Hertfordshire and co-founder of Do Something Different, said:
"Practising these habits really can boost our happiness. It's great to see so many people regularly doing things to help others - and when we make others happy we tend to feel good ourselves too. This survey shows that

practising self-acceptance is one thing that could make the biggest difference to many people's happiness. Exercise is also known to lift mood so if people want a simple, daily way to feel happier they should get into the habit of being more physically active too".

Dr Mark Williamson, Director of Action for Happiness, said: "Our society puts huge pressure on us to be successful and to constantly compare ourselves with others. This causes a great deal of unhappiness and anxiety. These findings remind us that if we can learn to be more accepting of ourselves as we really are, we're likely to be much happier. The results also confirm us that our day-to-day habits have a much bigger impact on our happiness than we might imagine".

To support participants who want to boost their happy habits, Do Something Different and Action for Happiness have also created a new Do Happiness programme, which sends people regular small positive actions (Do's) to help them practice the habits that science shows tend to make people happy.

How can we practise the self-acceptance habit?

Here are three positive actions that people can take to increase their levels of self-acceptance:

- Be as kind to yourself as you are to others. See your mistakes as opportunities to learn. Notice things you do well, however small
- Ask a trusted friend or colleague to tell you what your strengths are or what they value about you
- Spend some quiet time by yourself. Tune in to how you're feeling inside and try to be at peace with who you are.

Where did the happy habits come from?

The happy habits included in the survey are based on the Ten Keys to Happier Living framework, developed by Action for Happiness based on an extensive review of the latest research about what really affects mental wellbeing. Together the Ten Keys spell the acronym GREAT DREAM, as follows:

- Giving: do things for others
- Relating: connect with people
- Exercising: take care of your body
- Appreciating: notice the world around
- Trying out: keep learning new things
- Direction: have goals to look forward to
- Resilience: find ways to bounce back
- Emotion: take a positive approach
- Acceptance: be comfortable with who you are
- Meaning: be part of something bigger

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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