

Four habits of happy people—as recommended by a psychologist

February 21 2023, by Lowri Dowthwaite-Walsh



Happy habits = happy people. Credit: Pexels/Godisable jacob

What makes you happy? Maybe it's getting up early to see the sunrise, hanging out with family and friends on a weekend, or going for a dip in

the sea. But what does science say about the things happy people do?

We know that [happy people](#) tend to have [strong relationships](#), good physical health and contribute regularly to their communities.

I have experimented over the past seven years with a number of happiness and well-being interventions in a bid to improve my own mental health and to understand how to best help others. Some strategies have stuck while others haven't worked for me. But here's what I've learnt along the way.

The reality is that there'll be times we manage to engage with happiness habits and feel positive. Then there'll be occasions when life throws a curve ball and our happiness is affected. But the good news is that we can all improve our levels of happiness with [daily practice](#).

1. Move your body

My body needs to move regularly throughout the day. Sitting for long periods of time does not make my body or mind happy. At the very least I will walk briskly for an hour every day. I also like to swim, dance and do yoga.

Regular physical activity and exercise are high on the list for happiness as studies consistently demonstrate a link between being [physically active](#) and increased subjective well-being, aka happiness.

Research shows that walking for 30 minutes a day can improve your health. But [studies on happiness](#) show that people benefit more when they engage in moderate and [high-intensity exercise](#), which increases the heart rate.

[Moderate exercise](#) is anything that makes you slightly out of

breath—you can still talk but probably couldn't sing a song.

2. Prioritize connection

The most recent [happiness research](#) shows that our [social connections](#) are important in terms of overall [well-being and life satisfaction](#). Indeed, making time to talk, listen, share and have fun with friends and family is a habit I try to prioritize.

But a recent study has found that we generally engage more with friends and family when we feel unhappy and [less so when we are happy](#). This may be because we naturally seek out comfort and support to feel happier and pursue other activities when our happiness is stable.

It seems to come down to a question of balance, too much time alone can lead to negative emotions and so seeking out others is a natural way to alleviate this and boost our mood.

On the flip side when we feel positive and happier we are more inclined to support others and provide a shoulder to cry on. Nonetheless spending time in the company of friends and family provides both [short-term and long-term happiness gains](#).

3. Practice gratitude

Our outlook on life and how we evaluate things also plays a huge part in our happiness levels. Studies have found that having a more [optimistic mindset](#) and practicing a sense of gratitude can buffer against [negative emotions](#) and increase happiness.

Practicing daily gratitude, such as counting my blessings or listing things throughout the day. You can do this in a number of ways, for example, a

daily gratitude journal, which can be handwritten or kept on your phone.

[The three good things intervention](#) is a quick and easy habit to [adopt for increasing optimism](#). You simply write down three things that went well every day and reflect on what was good about these.

There are many apps now that can prompt you and keep track of your gratitude. Other apps allow you to create vision boards and positive affirmations for your days. Although some may seem gimmicky it's all about that gentle nudging towards positivity, [which the science supports](#). Or in other words, practicing and cultivating an attitude of gratitude and appreciation generally works, and helps you to feel more positive about your life. Gratitude also helps you to see the bigger picture and become more resilient in the face of adversity.

You can also practice gratitude more naturally by giving thanks—telling someone what you are grateful for that day or sending thank-you messages. Indeed, it might sound trite but this is important as [research](#) shows daily feelings of [gratitude](#) are associated with higher levels of positive emotions and better [social well-being](#).

4. Spending time with pets helps too

My pets are part and parcel of our family routine and also support me in my daily happiness. I find going for walks easier to do because of my dogs. Research shows that dogs motivate their human companions to be more active and in turn, both dog and human have a shared pleasurable experience that [boosts their happiness](#).

I also enjoy sitting with my cats while drinking tea and reading a book. Studies have found that family pets provide many benefits towards health and happiness, as they not only provide companionship but also reduce incidents of depression and anxiety while helping to boost our

[happiness and self-esteem levels.](#)

The main ingredients for [happiness](#) and what the research boils down to are social connections and activity—of both the mind and body. And finding a flow to life through our daily habits and intentions can lead to happier, more fulfilling lives.

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