

Five Prescriptions for Happiness



Most of us are familiar with the concept of Wellness, which is an approach to health that's all about taking care of ourselves so as to increase our strength and stave off illness. This is very different from the traditional medical model, which is about fixing what has already broken down. Wellness promotes prevention – and healing – by taking a more holistic approach to our health and our habits.

True wellness, of course, is multidimensional, encompassing our physical, intellectual and emotional selves. Each affects the other; for example, a stressful work or home life can affect our bodies in negative ways, while a healthy diet and physical exercise have consistently prove their ability to take the edge off mental and emotional stress.

In our fast-moving, multi-tasking culture it is so easy to get trapped in a doing, doing, doing cycle. Do you get so caught up in meeting others' expectations that you find yourself thinking, "what about me?!" Then this article is for you.

While your medical doctor encourages you to work on your physical self, I offer five "prescriptions" that have consistently proven effective in lifting the emotional states of the people who practice them regularly.

1. **Practice gratitude.** To build strength in your "positive emotion muscle," you must exercise it regularly. For one month, write down three blessings each day – positive aspects of your life or good things that occurred for you during that day. When you make it a priority to look for the positive in your life, you are more likely to see it as it happens and enjoy it more.
2. **Perform an act of kindness.** Have you ever dropped a dollar in a Salvation Army bucket, and noticed how you felt good about yourself as you did so? When human beings reach out to others, we fill our own "buckets" as well. Kindness can be as simple as being a good listener or offering a smile and a kind word to a harried clerk; or it can require the time to donate blood or volunteer for a cause you believe in. Kindness that is random or anonymous can be even more fun – and it always lifts our own soul.
3. **Take your own oxygen first.** When you're on an airplane and the flight attendants deliver their pre-flight safety talk, they always remind you to put on your oxygen mask first. Why? Because you're no good to others if your own air supply is cut off. So be positively selfish, and recognize that when you occasionally take time for YOU, you have more capacity to show up for everyone else. Diet and exercise are about taking care of you, of course. I also recommend you do something that feeds joy to your soul, even if all you can eke out is five minutes a day or one hour a week: indulge a hobby, read a book, enjoy a warm bath, meditate, work in your garden, pray, or even... nibble on dark chocolate!
4. **Eliminate frictions.** Friction occurs when one thing rubs against another and drains away energy. Most of us "tolerate" many things in our work or life, each of which increases stress: worry, unfinished projects, stuff that doesn't work right,

conversations we avoid, junk lying around, bad habits, and so on. Often the energy tied up in NOT taking action is more than what's required to take care of the issue. So take action on a toleration, and notice what happens: when you change or stop something that drains you, you free up that energy to enjoy life more.

5. **Choose your attitude.** Use the mind-body connection to help you respond differently to the world. Try this: slump your shoulders forward, look down, clench your jaw, and take shallow breaths. How's that feel? If you "live" in that body, notice what emotions hang out with you most often: anxiety, upset, worry, sadness, perhaps? If you want to shift your attitude, shift to a body in which more positive emotions can reside. Stand tall, look up at the horizon, smile, breathe deeply, and open your heart. Then notice how the world shifts – and how resilient you become -- when you "wear" happiness.

Instructions: Take at least one of these five daily. They are Guaranteed to make you – and those around you – feel happier!

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