



10 Ways To Improve Well-Being

by

Bryony Shaw MAPP



10 scientific, yet simple ways to improve well-being

10 Ways To Improve Well-Being

You may wish to improve your well-being but are not sure about how to go about it.

The activities in this booklet will improve your well-being by increasing the number of positive emotions you have in your life such as joy, gratitude, hope, amusement and inspiration.

Research has shown that positive emotions are beneficial as they improve our resilience, improve our creativity and counteract the negative effects of stress.

There are 10 activities for you to try out. Every person is different so this booklet contains a range of activities for you to try, some may be more suited to your needs and lifestyle than others. Decide for yourself which are most beneficial, some you may choose to use only occasionally while you may regularly incorporate others into your daily life.

We recommend that you spend at least one week doing each activity for two reasons. Firstly to familiarise yourself with the activity and secondly because the positive emotions associated with some activities have a cumulative effect which need to be given time to develop. If you really want these acts to become a regular part of your life, practice them for longer and they will become one of your habits, that improve your well-being.

Try them out and enjoy





The Activities

1. Keep a gratitude journal
2. Connect with nature
3. Random acts of kindness
4. Self-compassion
5. Savour your experiences
6. Laugh more
7. Use your strengths
8. Spot strengths in others
9. Don't expect to be happy all of the time
10. Enjoy the present

1 - Keep A Gratitude Journal

When something nice happens to you do you have time to fully appreciate it or do you find yourself rushing towards the next thing that you should be doing.

Is this familiar? Someone may do or say something positive towards you and you just brush it off, thinking to yourself 'they were just doing their job', or 'they would say that to everyone', or 'he/she would say that, they're my mum/dad/friend .' Even if this is the case, value their action.

Or do you have days, weeks, months when only bad things seem to happen. Even in this situation, keeping a gratitude journal can focus your mind to search out the positive meaning in your day.

Research has shown that writing down 3 things that you have to be thankful for increases positive emotions and improves our resilience to cope with stress. Find a time of day that is suited to your lifestyle and write down 3 things that happened in the last 24 hours that you are thankful for. On some days you may struggle to find 3, if this happens persevere, look at the minutiae of your day. On other days you may find it hard to choose only 3. Many people find the end of the day is the best time to do this and use paper notes books, computers or apps to incorporate it into their daily routine.

Find what works for you





2 - Connect With Nature

Spending time in natural environments improves well-being in many ways. It reduces negative emotions such as stress levels and improves positive emotions including creativity and joy.

It also helps us think by clearing the mind, improving our attention and helping us to be better at problem solving.

Take time out to reconnect with nature. Simple ways include diverting your journey to work to go through a park or down a street that has trees or attractive front gardens. Or you could take your lunch to the park. You could even hold meetings in the park if you have a difficult problem to solve.

When you have more time such as at the weekend or in the evenings go out for a walk or go to the park, the coast and the countryside. If you live in a city, work out a route that incorporates greenery. When you're in nature spend time walking, sitting and savouring (page 8). Make a record of how you felt when you were there.

Take time and enjoy

3 - Random Acts Of Kindness

Has anyone surprised you with a gift, a compliment or a thoughtful act? Do you remember how you felt? How do you think the person who surprised you felt?

Research has shown that doing a selfless act for another person increases our positive emotions. These acts can be for family or friends or for complete strangers. They can be simple or large acts, the key is that they need to entail some effort on our behalf. Large acts of kindness would be volunteering for a charity or organising a surprise thank you celebration for a friend/colleague.

Simple acts of kindness include offering a supportive smile to the parent struggling with the fractious child in a busy supermarket, letting the harassed looking person go before you in a queue, giving someone a book or film that you think they would like, write nice comments on a blog.

Look out for opportunities to do a random act of kindness, you can prepare these beforehand such as taking cakes into the office, buying a friend a plant. Or you can be spontaneous and see what the day brings in the way of opportunities to try to complete these selfless acts.

You'll be surprised at the difference it makes





4 - Self Compassion

Many of us offer kind words of support to friends in crisis or cut them some slack when we know they're stressed, but we don't do this for ourselves.

We can be our own worst critic and this is often amplified in times of stress; we don't think clearly and focus on all the things that we haven't done.

Be kind to yourself, show yourself some self compassion. Research has shown that increasing self compassion reduces stress levels and increases resilience.

Try this simple act when you're rushed and stressed.

Talk to yourself as you would to a good friend who is stressed or suffering. This will take away the judgemental aspect of our self talk and replace it with supportive, appreciative words. Try it out, set time aside for it as you would when supporting a friend, even 5 minutes will make a difference.

Care for yourself

5 - Savour Your Experiences

The sound of a child laughing, the warmth of sun on our face, time with friends, a smile from a stranger. Often these wonderful experiences pass too quickly and fade to memory, and the opportunity to increase our positive emotions has been wasted/ lost.

Research has shown that savouring, which is paying attention to and appreciating experiences such as these can increase our positive emotions. Taking time to intentionally focus our attention on what we do and what is going on around us allows us to appreciate the positive aspects of our experience and cultivate positive emotions such as joy, awe and amusement.

You can enhance your positive emotions through savouring by slowing down and consciously noticing what you are doing. Then paying attention to the positive aspects of your experience. Use all of your senses to focus on the most pleasurable aspects of experience these may be the smell, the taste or the humour of the situation.

Another way to increase positive emotions is to savour future events; enjoy planning and anticipating experiences, if possible share this anticipation with another person. Tell them about your plans and your hopes.

Slow down and enjoy





6 - Laugh More

How do you feel after a good laugh? Take time to recall the last time you had a really good laugh. How did you feel on the inside? How did your face, your sides feel? If you were with someone, how did you feel towards that person?

The chances are that you experienced a rush of positive emotions such as joy, humour, happiness and also felt close to the person you were laughing with.

Like many of us you may feel that this does not happen enough and that you could benefit from more laughter in your life. The good news is that you do not need to wait until someone recites a hilarious story for you to enjoy the benefits of laughter.

The body responds positively to laughter irrespective of its cause. You may recall a time when you overheard a stranger laughing and found yourself beginning to join in. You may not have been aware of the source of the hilarity but as laughter is contagious in the same way that yawning is contagious, you may have found yourself beginning to chuckle along.

Find more opportunities to laugh such as watching your favourite comedies or finding amusement in everyday situations.

See if there's a laughter group in your area, it's a place where people come together to share laughter. It may seem strange at first, laughing for no apparent reason but give it a go and you'll be amazed at the results.

There are many benefits associated with laughter including decreasing stress levels, increasing bonds with those that we laugh with and boosting our immune system.

What's there not to love?

7 - Use Your Strengths

What things do you do that leave you feeling energised and strong?
Take time to think about these, it may be when you're working with other people, when you are planning, when you are doing something creative.

Activities that leave us feeling invigorated and provide us with a sense of completeness are our strengths. They allow us to be our best possible self.

So often we focus on improving our weaknesses that we do not take time to value and develop our strengths. Research has shown that by working on our weaknesses we are likely to only become mediocre or average in the area of our weakness. Whereas if we spent as much time and energy developing our strengths we can excel and become experts.

We all have different strengths and some of us are fortunate to use them in our everyday life, maybe with our friends or in our job. Others of us find ourselves in jobs that are draining, they do not offer the opportunity to use our strengths. In this case, make use of the time you are not working to use and develop your strengths. If one of your strengths is listening you could volunteer for an organisation such as The Samaritans. Alternatively if one of your top strengths of curiosity, why not sign up for a night class or online class.

The energy we gain from utilising our strengths in one part of our life can have a knock on effect and make us feel more energised in other parts of our lives.

Discover the difference for yourself





8 - Spot Strengths In Others

Everyone has something good to offer.

Some people have good qualities which may mirror or complement our strengths. In these cases it is often easy to get on with this person, they are easy to like and we enjoy their company, after all we are similar in certain ways. It is relatively easy for us to appreciate their strengths.

With other people it is harder to spot and appreciate their strengths. Particularly in the case of those people with whom we clash. Often when people clash it is because they have very different interests, very different points of view and very different priorities to ourselves.

However by taking time to think about the person you clash with in a more objective way you allow yourself the possibility of being able to see their strengths. Think about them in different situations, think about what they do, think about the benefit of any of their actions for other people involved. You may begin to see them in a more complete light and reduce your focus on their behaviour that annoys you.

If you can do this with those people who rub you up the wrong way, how much easier will it be with others that you know. By spotting the strengths in our friends, family, colleagues and new acquaintances we savour their qualities and by appreciating their strengths we will add richness and flavour to our own life.

Strength spotting—a new hobby?

9 - Don't Expect To Be Happy All Of The Time

The activities in this booklet are designed to help increase your positive emotions. However the important role that negative emotions play should not be ignored. When we feel sad or angry it is for a reason and that reason can sometimes be used as a catalyst for change. For example if we feel angry about social injustice it may inspire us to write to our MP, go on a protest march or set up our own charity.

Negative emotions such as anger, fear and guilt have a strong evolutionary purpose and play a crucial role in keeping us safe. When we feel afraid the fear activates our fight or flight response and we make the change needed to keep us safe. Similarly when we feel guilt, it motivates us to change our behaviour so that we do not lose our friends and become isolated.

When you're feeling angry, fearful or disgusted, acknowledge these negative feelings, do not be annoyed with yourself that you still have down hours/days, this is normal. We lead complex lives with many pressures on us, we are bound to feel low or angry sometimes. Once you have acknowledged the negative feeling, see it for what it is, a response to a situation, it is context driven. Most situations change and with it, so do our emotions. We can instigate the change ourselves, maybe fuelled by our anger or fear or we find that other factors change.

If we find ourselves in a situation that is difficult to change and we want to reduce the negative emotions we are experiencing, we can practice some of the activities in this booklet to improve our resilience.

Both positive and negative emotions make us who we are





10 - Enjoy The Present

What are you seeing, smelling, tasting right now? How conscious were you of this before you read these lines? What was your mind focusing on?

We all spend time worrying about the future and the past often missing out on the wonder of the present. Our mind often takes us to the future and our thoughts may sound like this, have I done enough, got enough, prepared enough? Does this sound familiar?

Or maybe we spend time thinking about the past and what may have been if we'd done things differently. Not taken the job 50 miles away or not said yes to taking in lodgers. Ruminating on thoughts like this stops us from enjoying the moment and getting the most out of it.

The next time you take the rubbish out, walk along a pavement or make a phonecall, give your full attention to the task and see what a difference that makes. You will notice things previously ignored, you will stop the value judgements of your past and future orientated thoughts from tarnishing what you are doing.

Our thoughts are noisy, powerful forces and it may take time to focus on the present. Don't worry if that is the case, just keep practicing. You can use the practice savouring to help with this activity. It will help you to notice the good things in the present.

Focus and be here