

Daily habits

1. Smile

You tend to smile when you're happy. But it's actually a two-way street.

We smile because we're happy, and smiling causes the brain to release dopamine, which makes us happier.

That doesn't mean you have to go around with a fake smile plastered on your face all the time. But the next time you find yourself feeling low, crack a smile and see what happens. Or try starting each morning by smiling at yourself in the mirror.

2. Exercise

Exercise isn't just for your body. Regular exercise can help to reduce stress, feelings of anxiety, and symptoms of [depression](#) while boosting self-esteem and happiness.

Even a [small amount](#) of physical activity can make a difference. You don't have to train for a triathlon or scale a cliff — unless that's what makes you happy, of course.

The trick is not to overexert. If you suddenly throw yourself into a strenuous routine, you'll probably just end up frustrated (and sore).

Consider these exercise starters:

- Take a walk around the block every night after dinner.
- Sign up for a beginner's class in yoga or tai chi.

- Start your day with 5 minutes of stretching. [Here's a set of stretches to get you started.](#)

Remind yourself of any fun activities you once enjoyed, but that have fallen by the wayside. Or activities you always wanted to try, such as golf, bowling, or dancing.

3. Get plenty of sleep

No matter how much modern society steers us toward less sleep, we know that adequate sleep is [vital](#)^{Trusted Source} to good health, brain function, and emotional well-being.

Most adults need about [7 or 8 hours of sleep](#) every night. If you find yourself fighting the urge to nap during the day or just generally feel like you're in a fog, your body may be telling you it needs more rest.

Here are a few tips to help you build a better sleep routine:

- Write down how many hours of sleep you get each night and how rested you feel. After a week, you should have a better idea how you're doing.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, including weekends.
- Reserve the hour before bed as quiet time. Take a bath, read, or do something relaxing. Avoid heavy eating and drinking.
- Keep your bedroom dark, cool, and quiet.
- Invest in some good bedding.
- If you have to take a nap, try to limit it to 20 minutes.

If you consistently have problems sleeping, talk to your doctor. You may have a [sleep disorder](#) requiring treatment.

4. Eat with mood in mind

You already know that food choices have an impact on your overall physical health. But some foods can also affect your state of mind.

For example:

- **Carbohydrates** release [serotonin](#), a “feel good” hormone. Just keep simple carbs — foods high in sugar and starch — to a minimum, because that energy surge is short and you’ll crash. [Complex carbs](#), such as vegetables, beans, and whole grains, are better.
- **Lean meat, poultry, legumes, and dairy** are high in protein. These foods release dopamine and norepinephrine, which boost energy and concentration.
- **Highly processed or deep-fried foods** tend to leave you feeling down. So will skipping meals.

Start by making one better food choice each day.

For example, swap a big, sweet breakfast pastry for some Greek yogurt with fruit. You’ll still satisfy your sweet tooth, and the protein will help you avoid a mid-morning energy crash. Try adding in a new food swap each week.

5. Be grateful

Simply being grateful can give your mood a big boost, among other [benefits](#). For example, a [recent two-part study](#) found that practicing gratitude can have a significant impact on feelings of hope and happiness.

Start each day by acknowledging one thing you’re grateful for. You can do this while you’re brushing your teeth or just waiting for that snoozed alarm to go off.

As you go about your day, try to keep an eye out for pleasant things in your life. They can be big things, such as knowing that someone loves you or getting a well-deserved promotion.

But they can also be little things, such as a co-worker who offered you a cup of coffee or the neighbor who waved to you. Maybe even just the warmth of the sun on your skin.

With a little practice, you may even become more aware of all the positive things around you.

6. Give a compliment

[Research](#) shows that performing acts of kindness can help you feel more satisfied.

Giving a sincere compliment is a quick, easy way to brighten someone's day while giving your own happiness a boost.

Catch the person's eye and say it with a smile so they know you mean it. You might be surprised by how good it makes you feel.

If you want to offer someone a compliment on their physical appearance, make sure to do it in a respectful way. [Here are some tips to get you started.](#)

7. Breathe deeply

You're tense, your shoulders are tight, and you feel as though you just might "lose it." We all know that feeling.

Instinct may tell you to take a long, deep breath to calm yourself down.

Turns out, that instinct is a good one. According to [Harvard Health](#), deep breathing exercises can help reduce stress.

The next time you feel stressed or at your wit's end, work through these steps:

1. Close your eyes. Try to envision a happy memory or beautiful place.
2. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose.
3. Slowly breathe out through your mouth or nose.
4. Repeat this process several times, until you start to feel yourself calm down.

If you're having a hard time taking slow, deliberate breaths, try counting to 5 in your head with each inhale and exhale.

8. Acknowledge the unhappy moments

A positive attitude is generally a good thing, but bad things happen to everyone. It's just part of life.

If you get some bad news, make a mistake, or just feel like you're in a funk, don't try to pretend you're happy.

Acknowledge the feeling of unhappiness, letting yourself experience it for a moment. Then, shift your focus toward what made you feel this way and what it might take to recover.

Would a deep breathing exercise help? A long walk outside? Talking it over with someone?

Let the moment pass and take care of yourself. Remember, no one's happy all the time.

9. Keep a journal

A journal is a good way to organize your thoughts, analyze your feelings, and make plans. And you don't have to be a literary genius or write volumes to benefit.

It can be as simple as jotting down a few thoughts before you go to bed. If putting certain things in writing makes you nervous, you can always shred it when you've finished. It's the process that counts.

Not sure what to do with all the feelings that end up on the page? [Our guide to organizing your feelings can help.](#)

10. Face stress head-on

Life is full of stressors, and it's impossible to avoid all of them.

There's no need to. [Stanford psychologist Kelly McGonigal](#) says that stress isn't always harmful, and we can even change our attitudes about stress. [Learn more about the upside of stress.](#)

For those stressors you can't avoid, remind yourself that everyone has stress — there's no reason to think it's all on you. And chances are, you're stronger than you think you are.

Instead of letting yourself get overwhelmed, try to tackle the stressor head-on. This might mean initiating an uncomfortable conversation or putting in some extra work, but the sooner you tackle it, the sooner the pit in your stomach will start to shrink.

Weekly habits

11. Declutter

Decluttering sounds like a big project, but setting aside just 20 minutes a week can have a big impact.

What can you do in 20 minutes? Lots.

Set a timer on your phone and take 15 minutes to tidy up a specific area of one room — say, your closet or that out-of-control junk drawer. Put everything in its place and toss or give away any extra clutter that's not serving you anymore.

Keep a designated box for giveaways to make things a little easier (and avoid creating more clutter).

Use the remaining 5 minutes to do a quick walk through your living space, putting away whatever stray items end up in your path.

You can do this trick once a week, once a day, or anytime you feel like your space is getting out of control.

12. See friends (or facetime them at this current time)

Humans are social beings, and having close friends can make us happier.

Who do you miss? Reach out to them. Make a date to get together or simply have a long phone chat.

In adulthood, it can feel next to impossible to make new friends. But it's not about how many friends you have. It's about having meaningful relationships — even if it's just with one or two people.

Try getting involved in a local volunteer group or taking a class. Both can help to connect you with like-minded people in your area. And chances are, they're looking for friends, too.

Companionship doesn't have to be limited to other humans. Pets can offer similar benefits, according to [multiple studies](#).

Love animals but can't have a pet? Consider volunteering at a local animal shelter to make some new friends — both human and animal.

13. Plan your week

Feel like you're flailing about? Try sitting down at the end of every week and making a basic list for the following week.

Even if you don't stick to the plan, blocking out time where you can do laundry, go grocery shopping, or tackle projects at work can help to quiet your mind.

You can get a fancy planner, but even a sticky note on your computer or piece of scrap paper in your pocket can do the job.

14. Ditch your phone

Unplug. Really.

Turn off all the electronics and put those ear buds away for at least one hour once a week. They'll still be there for you later. If you still want them, that is.

If you haven't unplugged in a while, you might be surprised at the difference it makes. Let your mind wander free for a change. Read. Meditate. Take a walk and pay attention to your surroundings. Be sociable. Or be alone. Just be.

Sound too daunting? Try doing a shorter amount of time several times a week.

15. Get into nature

Spending 30 minutes or more a week in green spaces can help lower blood pressure and depression, according to a [2016 study](#) [Trusted Source](#).

Your green space could be anything from your neighborhood park, your own backyard, or a rooftop garden — anywhere you can appreciate some nature and fresh air.

Better yet, add some outdoor exercise into the mix for extra benefit.

16. Explore meditation

There are many [methods of meditation](#) to explore. They can involve movement, focus, spirituality, or a combination of all three.

Meditation doesn't have to be complicated. It can be as simple as sitting quietly with your own thoughts for 5 minutes. Even the deep breathing exercises mentioned earlier can serve as a form of meditation.

17. Consider therapy

We're certainly happier when we learn how to cope with obstacles. When you're faced with a problem, think about what got you through something similar in the past. Would it work here? What else can you try?

If you feel like you're hitting a brick wall, consider speaking with a therapist on a weekly basis. You don't need to have a diagnosed mental health condition or overwhelming crisis to seek therapy.

Therapists are trained to help people improve coping skills. Plus, there's no obligation to continue once you start.

Even just a few sessions can help you add some new goodies to your emotional toolbox.

Worried about the cost? [Here's how to afford therapy on any budget.](#)

18. Find a self-care ritual

It's easy to neglect self-care in a fast-paced world. But your body carries your thoughts, passions, and spirit through this world, doesn't it deserve a little TLC?

Maybe it's unwinding your workweek with a long, hot bath. Or adopting a skin care routine that makes you feel indulgent. Or simply setting aside a night to put on your softest jammies and watch a movie from start to finish.

Whatever it is, make time for it. Put it in your planner if you must, but do it.

Monthly habits

19. Give back

If you find that giving daily compliments provides a needed boost to your mood, considering making a monthly routine of giving back on a larger scale.

Maybe that's helping out at a food bank on the third weekend of every month, or offering to watch your friend's kids one night per month.

20. Take yourself out (not at the moment 😞)

No one to go out with? Well, what rule says you can't go out alone?

Go to your favourite restaurant, take in a movie, or go on that trip you've always dreamed of.

Even if you're a social butterfly, spending some deliberate time alone can help you reconnect with the activities that truly make you happy.

21. Create a thought list

You arrive for an appointment with 10 minutes to spare. What do you do with that time? Pick up your cell phone to scroll through social media? Worry about the busy week you have ahead of you?

Take control of your thoughts during these brief windows of time.

At the start of each month, make a short list of happy memories or things you're looking forward to on a small piece of paper or on your phone.

When you find yourself waiting for a ride, standing in line at the grocery store, or just with a few minutes to kill, break out the list. You can even use it when you're just generally feeling down and need to change up your thoughts.

Yearly habits

22. Take time to reflect

The start of a new year is a good time to stop and take inventory of your life. Set aside some time to catch up with yourself the way you would with an old friend:

- How are you doing?
- What have you been up to?
- Are you happier than you were a year ago?

But try to avoid the pitfall of judging yourself too harshly for your answers. You've made it to another year, and that's plenty.

If you find that your mood hasn't improved much over the last year, consider making an appointment with your doctor or talking to a therapist. You might

be dealing with depression or even an underlying physical condition that's impacting your mood.

23. Reevaluate your goals

People change, so think about where you're heading and consider if that's still where you want to go. There's no shame in changing your game.

Let go of any goals that no longer serve you, even if they sound nice on paper.

24. Take care of your body

You hear it all the time, including several times in this article, but your physical and mental health are closely intertwined.

As you build habits to improve your happiness, make sure to follow up with routine appointments to take care your body:

- see your primary care physician for an [annual physical](#)
- take care of any chronic health conditions and see specialists as recommended
- see your dentist for an oral exam and follow up as recommended
- get your vision checked

25. Let go of grudges

This is often easier said than done. But you don't have to do it for the other person.

Sometimes, offering forgiveness or dropping a grudge is more about self-care than compassion for others.

Take stock of your relationships with others. Are you harboring any resentment or ill will toward someone? If so, consider reaching out to them in an effort to bury the hatchet.

This doesn't have to be a reconciliation. You may just need to end the relationship and move on.

If reaching out isn't an option, try getting your feelings out in a letter. You don't even have to send it to them. Just getting your feelings out of your mind and into the world can be freeing.