



# RETIREE BENEFITS

## News

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### Seven Simple Ways to Find Joy Every Day

Learn seven simple ways to boost your happiness by making small changes in your daily life.

How happy are you? It's not a question people ask themselves that often. After all, happiness can mean different things to different people. But there are some general factors that play a role in feelings of satisfaction, according to research.

A big one is health — the better someone feels physically and emotionally, the happier they tend to be. Other factors include having people you can count on for support and having a sense of meaning in life. It's also important to have basic needs met, from food to shelter.

It's possible to have all these things and still feel there's something missing. That's totally normal. In those moments, there are simple things to do that can improve your mood and increase optimism. Here are 7 ways to get started.

#### Keep a gratitude journal

This can help you notice the small, seemingly insignificant things in daily life that bring joy, explains Heidi McBain, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Texas. To begin, McBain suggests grabbing a journal at the end of the day and writing down one specific thing that you're grateful for.

Try to skip general ideas, like *I'm thankful for my family*, suggests McBain. "Instead, write something more specific from the day, such as, *I'm grateful my son gave me a hug before leaving for school today*," she says. Over time, this exercise can boost happiness by teaching the brain to focus more on the positive aspects of life, McBain explains.

#### Spend time in nature

Being outside can help you feel happier. That can mean spending time in the garden or walking through the woods. Just being outdoors may help lower stress levels, improve mood, and even make people more cooperative, studies find.

But if getting outside isn't possible, you can still experience the benefits. Just listening to the sounds of birds or waves crashing may help. Watching nature videos may work as a mood-booster too.

#### Push back against your inner critic

Most of us have a critical voice in our head. But if that voice is often judgmental or discouraging, it can steal the joy out of life, says McBain. "Negative self-talk can pull your attention away from all the positive aspects of your life," she explains.

If you notice yourself being overly harsh and critical, it can help to put a kinder spin on things. For instance, instead of thinking, *I can't do anything right*, try: *That didn't go well, but now I know what to do better next time*. If negative self-talk has become a big problem, a talk therapist can help break the cycle, McBain says.

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## **Say yes to volunteering**

It goes without saying that volunteering can have a positive impact on others. But did you know that volunteering is great for the volunteer too?

People who volunteer are happier and more satisfied with their lives. It may also be good for the heart. Those who volunteer have lower blood sugar levels and higher HDL, also known as good cholesterol. Overall, it's a win-win.

## **Stay as active as possible**

Regular exercise can help keep you healthy and strong. But physical activity can promote happiness too, across all ages. Working out lowers stress levels by releasing mood-lifting brain chemicals. And it may be as effective as medication for people who are anxious or depressed. Walk, dance, play pickleball or do whatever physical activity you enjoy several times a week, if you can.

## **Make sleep a priority**

Sometimes, the route to an attitude shift is through a good night's sleep. But roughly one in three adults in the United States don't get enough of it. That can increase feelings of frustration and worry. It can also make people crankier.

To help start the day rested and recharged, stick to a regular sleep schedule. Wind down before turning in by doing something soothing, such as reading. Or try relaxation techniques, such as meditation.

## **Stay connected**

"Emotionally connecting with others is so important to our overall happiness and well-being," says McBain. The stronger the relationships people have, the happier they tend to be.

Being around other people can take many forms, McBain notes. "It can be anything from having a deep conversation with a friend to being part of something bigger than yourself, like attending a concert with hundreds of likeminded people," she says.

You don't have to do all seven of these things every day. But trying to work a few of these activities into each week could have a noticeable effect on your mood.