

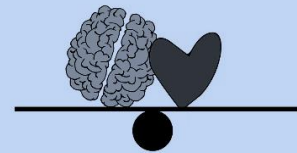
Happiness and Mental Health

Generally speaking, happiness is a feeling we want to have. Many of us take great strides to help improve, or foster our happiness. Vacations, movies, games, hobbies, we all use different methods to try to inject enjoyment and happiness into our lives.

The purpose of this month's newsletter will be to better understand happiness and its role in the body as well as steps we can take to create extra happiness throughout our days. These can be especially useful for those days (or weeks) where happiness seems especially hard to find.



Our emotions are a very complicated system of bio-feedback. They provide us signals and clues about what's going on and listening closely to them helps us to stay healthy. Our feelings are like the lights, signals and gauges of the dashboard of our car. They alert us to crucial information that helps us to keep our bodies and minds running smoothly. Put in this context, when we feel happy, our body is shouting "Yes! More!" and we are encouraged to try to continue seeking out this feeling.

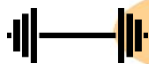


Our brain releases chemicals to make us happy. Serotonin and Dopamine are two of the chemicals our brain uses to produce happiness. Serotonin and Dopamine help us to continue seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, thus maintaining our motivation and rewarding us for "good behavior." Better understanding both of these chemicals helps to reveal effective methods for plugging happiness into our lives.

Serotonin Seeking

Serotonin helps regulate our moods and helps us to avoid things like depression. Increasing our Serotonin can have very positive effects on our moods.

Sunlight: sunlight provides us with vitamin D which contributes to Serotonin production. 20 min of sun exposure can help our brain release more Serotonin.



Exercise: regular exercise can be an effective way to help with your Serotonin production. Exercise can also help us to regulate our moods and feel accomplished.

Volunteerism and Service of Others

"He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he" (Proverbs 16:20). A strongly held Catholic belief, service of others, is shown to boost our happiness. "One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly but comes to poverty." (Proverbs 11:24)



Develop Your Dopamine

Dopamine fulfills a number of roles in our body, one of these is strengthening our natural motivation and reward system. We feel better when we accomplish something and receive a reward.

Reflect on the good: our dopamine is increased when we have a sense of accomplishment. it is the reason we strive to beat a personal record, or accomplish our task list. Take time to reflect on some of your greatest achievements and the dopamine will surely follow.



Set goals: set goals for yourself and break them down into smaller tasks. Accomplishing each task on the list provides a burst of dopamine reward. Make sure to have your next goal planned before accomplishing your current goal so you can keep up the momentum! Your body even responds to just making the list.

Positivity Prompts

As a society we spend a lot of time trying to avoid or get rid of certain feelings, and don't often think of what feelings we would like to take their place. Ask yourself some of these questions throughout your day to help prompt some positivity and happiness.

What has been the high point of the day?

What is something you are looking forward to?

What have you done in the past you are proud of?

Who is the best person that you know?

Who is someone who is usually happy to see you?

What are three things you are grateful for?

What is your favorite childhood memory?

What was the last compliment you remember receiving?

Name 5 people who love you dearly.

Engaging the Senses

Sight: what is something that makes you happy to look at? A piece of art? The Outdoors? Plug time into your day to see it.



Sound: immerse yourself in sounds you will find pleasing to hear. Your favorite music, crashing waves, or birds calls.



Smell: what smell will make you feel comfortable, or trigger a fond memory? Smell can be one of our strongest ties to memories.



Taste: allowing ourselves a reasonable treat or indulgence is a good way to activate our body's feel good chemicals.



Touch: Maybe today will be a tough one and you may need to wear your comfiest sweater, or take a nice warm bath at the end of the day. Our favorite textures and feelings can be very comforting.

