

ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

Happiness Action Pack



Putting the science of well-being into practice

**"Happiness is not something ready made.
It comes from your own actions"**

- Dalai Lama

Developed by Action for Happiness with support from Headspace and Vanessa King MAPP.

Your happiness

Take a moment to think about what happiness means to you. Note down whatever comes in to your head.

What does happiness mean to you?

Example: Feeling good about how things are going

Now think about specific things that often make you happy. These could be activities, people, places or anything else that comes to mind.

What things make you happy?

Example: A relaxing day at home with my family

Assess your happiness

a) **Your overall level of happiness** with life (General Happiness Survey):
www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/general-happiness-scale

b) **Your current mood** (Positive and Negative Affect survey, PANAS):
www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/panas-questionnaire

GREAT DREAM

Ten keys to happier living

Action for Happiness has developed the 10 Keys to Happier Living based on a review of the latest scientific research relating to happiness.

Everyone's path to happiness is different, but the research suggests these ten things consistently tend to have a positive impact on people's overall happiness and well-being.

The first five relate to how we interact with the **outside** world in our daily activities. The second five come more from **inside** us and depend on our attitude to life.

GIVING



Do things for others

RELATING



Connect with people

EXERCISING



Take care of your body

AWARENESS



Live life mindfully

TRYING OUT



Keep learning new things

DIRECTION



Have goals to look forward to

RESILIENCE



Find ways to bounce back

EMOTIONS



Look for what's good

ACEPTANCE



Be comfortable with who you are

MEANING



Be part of something bigger

What do the 10 keys mean for you?

The 10 Keys are explained in more detail below. Each key has a related question to help us think about how it applies in our own lives. There are no right or wrong answers – it's just helpful to reflect on these different aspects of our lives. Write down your own answers below.

GIVING

Do things for others

Caring about others is fundamental to our happiness. Helping other people is not only good for them and a great thing to do, it also makes us happier and healthier too. Giving also creates stronger connections between people and helps to build a happier society for everyone. And it's not all about money - we can also give our time, ideas and energy. So if you want to feel good, do good!



Q: What do you do to help others?

RELATING

Connect with people

Relationships are the most important overall contributor to happiness. People with strong and broad social relationships are happier, healthier and live longer. Close relationships with family and friends provide love, meaning, support and increase our feelings of self worth. Broader networks bring a sense of belonging. So taking action to strengthen our relationships and create new connections is essential for happiness.



Q: Who matters most to you?

EXERCISING

Take care of your body

Our body and our mind are connected. Being active makes us happier as well as being good for our physical health. It instantly improves our mood and can even lift us out of a depression. We don't all need to run marathons - there are simple things we can all do to be more active each day. We can also boost our well-being by unplugging from technology, getting outside and making sure we get enough sleep!



Q: How do you stay active and healthy?

AWARENESS

Live life mindfully

Ever felt there must be more to life? Well good news, there is! And it's right here in front of us. We just need to stop and take notice. Learning to be more mindful and aware can do wonders for our well-being in all areas of life - like our walk to work, the way we eat or our relationships. It helps us get in tune with our feelings and stops us dwelling on the past or worrying about the future - so we get more out of the day-to-day.



Q: When do you stop and take notice?

TRYING OUT

Keep learning new things

Learning affects our well-being in lots of positive ways. It exposes us to new ideas and helps us stay curious and engaged. It also gives us a sense of accomplishment and helps boost our self-confidence and resilience. There are many ways to learn new things - not just through formal qualifications. We can share a skill with friends, join a club, learn to sing, play a new sport and so much more.



Q: What new things have you tried recently?

DIRECTION

Have goals to look forward to

Feeling good about the future is important for our happiness. We all need goals to motivate us and these need to be challenging enough to excite us, but also achievable. If we try to attempt the impossible this brings unnecessary stress. Choosing ambitious but realistic goals gives our lives direction and brings a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when we achieve them.



Q: What are your most important goals?

RESILIENCE

Find ways to bounce back

All of us have times of stress, loss, failure or trauma in our lives. But how we respond to these has a big impact on our well-being. We often cannot choose what happens to us, but in principle we can choose our own attitude to what happens. In practice it's not always easy, but one of the most exciting findings from recent research is that resilience, like many other life skills, can be learned.



Q: How do you bounce back in tough times?

EMOTIONS

Look for what's good

Positive emotions – like joy, gratitude, contentment, inspiration, and pride – are not just great at the time. Recent research shows that regularly experiencing them creates an 'upward spiral', helping to build our resources. So although we need to be realistic about life's ups and downs, it helps to focus on the good aspects of any situation – the glass half full rather than the glass half empty.



Q: What are you feeling good about?

ACCEPTANCE

Be comfortable with who you are

No-one's perfect. But so often we compare our insides to other people's outsides. Dwelling on our flaws - what we're not rather than what we've got - makes it much harder to be happy. Learning to accept ourselves, warts and all, and being kinder to ourselves when things go wrong, increases our enjoyment of life, our resilience and our well-being. It also helps us accept others as they are.



Q: What is the real you like?

MEANING

Be part of something bigger

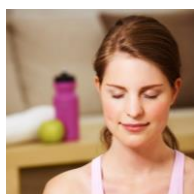
People who have meaning and purpose in their lives are happier, feel more in control and get more out of what they do. They also experience less stress, anxiety and depression. But where do we find 'meaning and purpose'? It might be our religious faith, being a parent or doing a job that makes a difference. The answers vary for each of us but they all involve being connected to something bigger than ourselves.



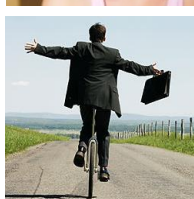
Q: What gives your life meaning?

Taking Action: some practical ideas

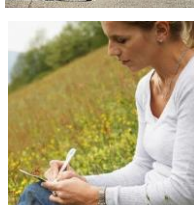
The following pages introduce a series of **simple actions** to take in your daily life. They are just some of the many things that recent scientific research shows can have a positive impact on our happiness and fulfilment.



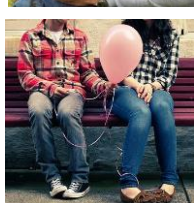
1) Daily mindfulness



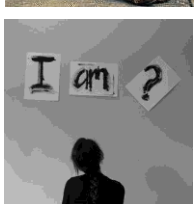
2) Three good things



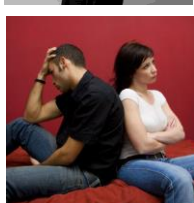
3) Letter of thanks



4) Extra acts of kindness



5) Use your strengths

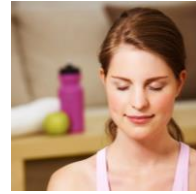


6) Look for the good in people

You don't have to try to do all the exercises at once. Ideally, alongside your mindfulness practice, you would select one or two actions to try for a few days and see how this works for you. Variety is good so try different exercises.

Don't worry if some actions work well and others don't - everyone has their personal preferences. You may want to make the actions you find useful part of your on-going routine.

1) Daily mindfulness



Introduction

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment. When we're mindful we become more aware of our thoughts and feelings and better able to manage them.

Being mindful can boost our concentration, improve our relationships and help with stress or depression. It can even have a positive effect on physical problems like chronic pain.

Anyone can learn to be mindful. It's simple, you can do it anywhere, and the results can be life-changing.

Take 10 minutes each day to do a simple mindfulness meditation.

Many of us spend much of our time focused either on the past or on the future, paying very little attention to what is happening right now.

Being mindful involves staying in the moment, spending more time noticing what's going on both inside ourselves and in our surroundings. Rather than trying to change things it involves accepting the way that things are, for better or for worse.

You can follow a free **10-day daily guided meditation** on the **Headspace** website: www.headspace.com/register/free-trial

You can also download the free Headspace app here:

iTunes: <http://itunes.apple.com/app/headspace-on-the-go/id493145008>

Google Play: <http://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.getsomeheadspace.android>

Amazon App store: www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B00HCIW9XO

2) Three Good Things



Introduction

Being grateful is about much more than just saying thank you – it's about not taking things for granted and having a sense of appreciation and thankfulness for life.

People who are grateful tend to be happier, healthier and more fulfilled. Being grateful can help people cope with stress and can even have a beneficial effect on heart rate.

Each day write down three good things that happened. They can be anything you feel good about or grateful for.

Even on a bad day there are normally some things that we can feel good about. Taking time to be grateful is not about ignoring the bad things – it just helps us focus our attention more on the positive, rather than dwell on the negative.

To get used to the idea, start by filling in the boxes below to describe three good things that happened to you **yesterday** and why they were good.

Try to include **why** you felt each of the things was really good.

<i>Good Thing 1</i> Example: Best night's sleep for ages so felt much more energetic !
<i>Good Thing 2</i> Example: Lunch with Steve and Jane – great to see old friends again
<i>Good Thing 3</i> Example: Home in time to bath the kids. We really had fun together

Now repeat this activity **at the end of each day** for a week. Use the blank boxes on the following pages to write down your Three Good Things down each day.

Note: Gratitude exercises (Three Good Things and Letter of Thanks) are based on work by Emmons and McCullough, (2003) and Seligman, M.E., Steen, T.A., Park, N. and Peterson, C., (2005).

Three Good Things exercise

Write down three good things that happened to you today. They can be anything you feel good about or grateful for.

Use this sheet to keep a record of your Three Good Things each day over the course of a week. Try to include **why** you felt each of the things was really good.

Try to write down your three good things every day if possible – but if for some reason you miss a day then don't worry, just carry on the next day.

You could even talk to your family or friends about your three good things and ask them about theirs.

1	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

2	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

3	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

Three Good Things exercise (continued)

4	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

5	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

6	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

7	Day/date:
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

3) Letter of thanks



Introduction

Studies show that expressing our gratitude to others can significantly boost our happiness. It can also have a powerful effect on the recipient and help strengthen your relationship.

Who are you really grateful to?

Think of three people who have been a really positive influence in your life and that you feel really grateful to.

They could be a member of your family, an old teacher, long-lost friend, colleague or someone else who has made a real difference in your life.

Person 1: Who is it and why are you grateful to them?

Person 2: Who is it and why are you grateful to them?

Person 3: Who is it and why are you grateful to them?

Now choose one of these people to write to and tell them how grateful you are; perhaps someone you've not thanked properly before.

Think about the impact this person had on you and write a letter to tell them:

- What specifically are you grateful for?
- How did they help you?
- How did it help make you the person you are today?

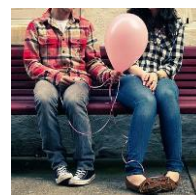
You can write the letter any way you like – but try to be really in touch with the feeling of being grateful to them as you write.

If possible, arrange to **visit the person** and read the letter aloud to them. Otherwise post or email the letter to them and maybe follow up with a phone call.

Who did you write your letter of gratitude to? How did it feel?

A close-up of a hand holding a black marker, writing the words 'Thank you' in a cursive script on a white surface.

4) Extra acts of kindness



Introduction

Doing things to help others is not only good for the recipients - it has a positive payback for our happiness and health too. When people experience kindness it also makes them kinder as a result – so kindness is contagious!

As the saying goes: "if you want to feel good, do good"

Perform extra act of kindness each day.

This could be a compliment, a helping hand, a hug, a gift or something else. The act may be large or small and the recipient may not even be aware of it.

Ideally your acts of kindness should be beyond the kind things you already do on a regular basis. And of course the acts mustn't put you or others in danger!

Do at least one extra kind act each day for a week, ideally a different one each day.

Here are some ideas for acts of kindness:

1. Give up your seat	21. Tell someone if you notice they're doing a good job
2. Hold a door open for someone	22. Pass on a book you've enjoyed
3. Give a (sincere) compliment	23. Say sorry (you know who to)
4. Make someone laugh	24. Forgive someone for what they've done
5. Give someone a hug	25. Visit a sick friend, relative or neighbour
6. Take time to really listen to someone	26. Buy an unexpected gift for someone
7. Make someone new feel welcome	27. Bake something for a neighbour
8. Let one car in on every journey	28. Pay for someone in the queue behind
9. Give directions to someone who's lost	29. Do a chore that you don't normally do
10. Have a conversation with a stranger	30. Help out someone in need
11. Pick up litter as you walk	31. Offer to look after a friend's children
12. Let someone in front of you in the supermarket queue	32. Offer to mow your neighbour's lawn
13. Tell someone they mean a lot to you	33. Donate your old things to charity
14. Let someone have your parking spot	34. Give food to a homeless person and take time to talk with them
15. Read a story with a child	35. Visit someone who may be lonely
16. Offer your change to someone struggling to find the right amount	36. Give blood
17. Treat a loved one to breakfast in bed	37. Get back in contact with someone you've lost touch with
18. Buy cakes or fruit for your colleagues	38. Organise a fundraising event
19. Invite your neighbour round for a drink and a chat	39. Volunteer your time for a charity
20. Offer to help with someone's shopping	40. Plan a street party

Note: Kindness benefits and exercises based on work by Lyubomirsky, S. (2007)

Acts of kindness exercise

Do **at least one** extra kind act each day for a week, ideally a different one each day.

Ideally your act of kindness should be something beyond the kind things you do on a regular basis.

Use this sheet to keep a record of your acts of kindness. You can also note down how you felt about doing them and whether you found them easy or difficult.

1 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

2 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

3 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

4 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

5 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

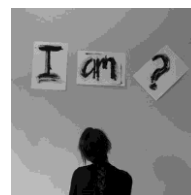
6 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

7 Day/date:

What did you do? Who for? How did it go?

5) Use your strengths



Introduction

Understanding and using our strengths is about focusing on the things that come most naturally to us and that we love to do. Research shows that using our strengths in new ways can make us happier even after just one week!

Assess your strengths and then focus on using these in new ways.

Step 1: Identify your strengths

Carry out the VIA Character Strengths assessment here (takes up to 30 minutes):
www.viacharacter.org/www/the-survey

This shows which of 24 character strengths are your "**signature strengths**". Make sure you answer the questions as you really are, not how you think you should be!
Note down your **top five strengths** from the survey results:

<i>Strength 1</i>
<i>Strength 2</i>
<i>Strength 3</i>
<i>Strength 4</i>
<i>Strength 5</i>

Step 2: Review your strengths

Have a look at each of your top 5 in turn and ask yourself:

- Do I feel naturally drawn to this strength (excited, energised etc)?
- Do I feel surprised by it - is this the real me?
- How much do I use this strength currently (at work, at home etc)?
- Would others see it in me? (if you're not sure, ask them!)

If you don't feel that one of the five is the real you, then look at numbers 6, 7 or 8 and ask the same questions. Get to a list of 5 that you feel really are 'you'.

Step 3: Use your strengths

Pick one of your top 5 strengths and ask yourself:

- How do I use this already and in what areas of my life?
- What are other areas in my life that I could use it more?
- What are other ways I could use it?

Every day over the next week, try to use this strength in a new way or a new area of your life. Repeat the following week using another of your top five. And so on.

Note: Based on work by Seligman, M.E., Steen, T.A., Park, N. and Peterson, C., (2005).

6) Look for the good in people



Introduction

It's easy to take our nearest and dearest for granted. Constant criticism can be highly destructive, but we often fall into this trap, especially in established relationships.

But if we take time to bring to mind what we value and appreciate about others, we can both get more enjoyment from our time together. Research suggests we should ideally aim for five positive interactions to every negative one.

Appreciate the good things about someone important in your life.

Focus on a partner, close friend or family member and take time to think through the following questions – in each case try to note down specific examples:

1. What drew you to your partner or your friend when you first met?
2. What things have you really enjoyed doing together during your relationship?
3. What things do you really appreciate about them right now?
4. What are their strengths?

Then (and this is the important bit!), when you're with that person take the time to notice and acknowledge these things – their strengths, the things they do that you really appreciate, the happy times you've shared together and so on.

"I really love it when you... "

"You're so good at... "

"Seeing you do... reminds me of that fantastic day when we... "

It's unlikely to be practical to do this type of reflection for everyone we know. But we can still use the same principles to improve all our relationships.

For example, before spending time with someone, take a moment just to think about the things you like and appreciate about them, what you admire about them or how they make you feel good.

Similarly, after spending time with someone, think about the things you appreciated or what you enjoyed about your time together.

Note: Adapted from research by psychologist John Gottman