

# Building Happiness

External factors have very little influence on our happiness. Promotions, new relationships, and lucky lottery wins give only a temporary boost to happiness before we return to a biological baseline. Sustained happiness takes work. Listed below are exercises that, when practiced frequently, can build habits of happiness. Choose a few exercises that fit well with your life and make a point to practice them every day.

**Gratitudes:** Write down three things for which you are grateful every day. Don't worry if they seem simple or mundane—just get something down on paper. Writing gratitudes will help you identify positive aspects of even the worst days.

**Acts of kindness:** Make a conscious effort to do something nice for no reason other than to help. You might be surprised how a simple act of kindness can turn around the day for both you and the kindness recipient.

**Exercise:** The positive effects of exercise are astounding. Physically active people have increased energy, superior immune systems, and a frequent sense of accomplishment. Exercise can reduce insomnia, stimulate brain growth, and even act as an anti-depressant. If jogging or lifting weights seems like too much, don't be afraid to start with a 30 minute walk or a slow bike ride.

**Meditation:** Research has linked meditation with reduced anxiety and more positive emotions. Those who meditate regularly may even permanently restructure their brains to create sustained happiness.

**Positive journaling:** Take some time to write about positive events in your life. Write about a fun day spent with friends, a good movie, or an activity you enjoyed. Positive journaling will get you into the habit of focusing on the positive.

**Fostering relationships:** Strong social connections are thought to be one of the most powerful influences on our mood. Those who are dedicated to spending time with friends and family show the highest levels of happiness. If you can't see your loved ones every day you can still send an email or make a phone call. If it feels like you *never* see your loved ones, schedule time that can be dedicated to them.