

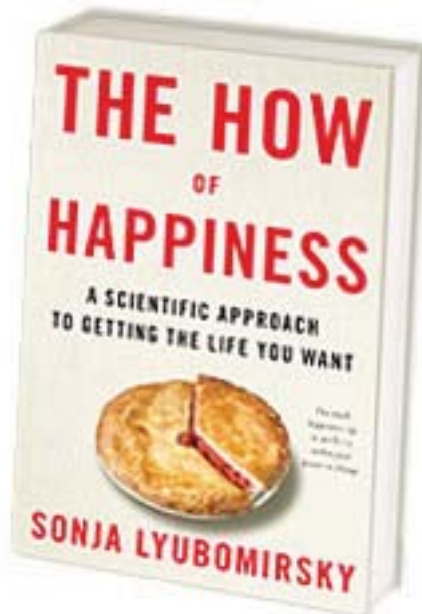
Twelve Steps to Happiness

Research suggests that your happiness may be partially within your control. But isn't that easier said than done, especially if you struggle with depression, anxiety, or another mental health concern?

Forty percent of our happiness may be within our power to control—and making ourselves happier could take less than 10 minutes a day, according to University of California, Riverside, psychology professor Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD.

Lyubomirsky has been researching happiness for nearly two decades. Her new book, "The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want" (Penguin Press, 2008) is the first in its genre to be based on scientific evidence.

In her book, she details the steps we can take to control the 40% (or more) of happiness that is within our control. Controlling happiness may be very



similar to weight loss—it can take a lot of time and commitment, especially if your body's "set point" leads you to naturally gain weight (or be unhappy). If your set point for happiness is lower than you'd like, and you want to be happier, it can take a lot of effort.

So what are some of the ways we can be happier? Lyubomirsky's ideas include expressing gratitude and reflecting on happy moments to permanently bolster one's happiness level. In one study, people who thought about happy life

THE PATH TO HAPPINESS IS NOT NECESSARILY EASY, BUT IT IS WITHIN YOUR REACH

events for eight minutes every day for three days felt increased life satisfaction four weeks later than they had prior to the study.

Other strategies include exercising, practicing optimism when thinking about the future and decreasing overthinking ("will this matter in a year?"), building meaningful relationships, and learning how to distance yourself from distressing thoughts.

Additional strategies include practicing acts of kindness, as well as living in the here & now and savoring life's joys. Committing to two or three meaningful goals and pursuit of them and learning to forgive and let go of resentment are also important.

These ideas won't work for everyone of course. If you have tried them and you are still unhappy, or if haven't tried them and you think they won't help, give us a call.

Happiness Seminar

Ann Arbor Consultation Services will be offering a happiness seminar beginning in September. Contact us at (734) 996-9111 to learn more.

AACS CAN HELP
AACS has over 40 clinicians with specialties covering almost every mental health need



DID YOU KNOW

That it probably isn't endorphins that help exercisers cope better with stress—instead, the "stress" of exercise gives our body practice with its stress response, so it becomes more finely tuned and efficient. Exercise may also modify norepinephrine levels, which protects against depressed mood. But you don't have to exercise intensely, a walking program is enough. See more Keys to Exercise on the next page.

Learn Mindfulness at AACS

Robert Martin, MA, LMSW, is Ann Arbor Consultation Services' resident expert on mindfulness. He has over 25 years of experience studying, practicing and teaching the technique. Robert has recently started offering groups that teach the technique. Contact us at (734) 996-9111 to learn more.

If you'd like to try to learn the strategies on your own, try our article to the left; Robert also recommends the book "Wherever you go, there you are" by Jon Kabat Zinn.



Mindfulness in 10 Minutes a Day

Mindfulness can help with depression, stress, medical conditions (such as chronic pain)—and making people happier.

Mindfulness meditation has been popularized in large part due to the efforts of Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD (Stress Reduction Clinic and Center for Mindfulness, University of Massachusetts Medical School). A recent clinical trial examining mindfulness as a strategy for treatment-resistant depression was very promising. This has catapulted mindfulness onto the front page in both clinics and research programs across the US.

So what is mindfulness?

Mindfulness refers to being aware of your thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions in a nonjudgmental manner. Existing with them in the here and now, "being present."

Mindfulness is generally considered a third generation behavioral therapy—basically an extension of cognitive therapy. In traditional cognitive therapy,

people learn to accurately assess their thoughts. Research shows that just being aware of your thoughts (and not challenging them) is probably most helpful for many people. Mindfulness is one way to become more aware of your thoughts, to get distance from them, perspective on them. People who regularly practice mindfulness tend to become less distressed by their thoughts and feelings.

Is mindfulness for me?

It's hard to say without knowing your exact situation, although it is unlikely that mindfulness would be harmful. Thus far research indicates it is likely to be helpful for treatment-resistant depression and chronic pain. Research with other types of problems is still ongoing, although most experts agree that it will likely be helpful for many mental health concerns.

So how exactly can I learn mindfulness in 10 minutes a day?

Start with mindfulness of breathing. Find a comfortable spot, and focus your attention on your breathing. Notice how you naturally breathe, describing it with your 5 senses. When your attention drifts away from your breathing (which it will invariably do), notice that, and then direct your attention back to your breathing. Then, when you feel ready, focus on breathing 4 counts in, and 4 counts out. If you put your hands on your stomach, you will notice your hands moving in and out. Breathe in through your nose, out through your mouth. Continue to describe your breathing to yourself.

Interested in learning more? Contact us to meet with a clinician who will be able to help you practice further.

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KEYS TO EXERCISE

Exercise helps make people happier

But most people don't exercise--so how do I get started?

Summer is the time of year that many of us begin to exercise more. Swimming, jogging, biking/cycling and hiking are some of the fun activities we have waited all winter (a very long winter!) to enjoy. Here are some tips to keep in mind when moving to the outdoors to exercise:

Start small (especially if you haven't been exercising during the winter). Make sure your goals are realistic. Even 10 minutes of exercise each day has benefits, and that includes walking, lawn care and gardening!



REGULAR WALKING IS ENOUGH TO PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS TO YOUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH, INCLUDING BEING HAPPIER

Forgiveness

Letting go isn't easy--but it is critical for happiness

Resentment (and even desire for revenge) is a large barrier on the road to happiness. But forgiveness doesn't come naturally to most people. Below are some of our suggestions to help you forgive.

Recognize the value of forgiveness. Understand that forgiveness has multiple benefits for you. There are benefits to your physical health--lower blood pressure, fewer heart risks, and less chronic pain. There are benefits to your mental health--less anger, hostility, anxiety and depression, and more happiness.

Remember that forgiveness primarily benefits you and not the person who wronged you. People who forgive are happier, and they have multiple physical health benefits too.

Forgiveness doesn't mean accepting A common barrier to forgiveness is the belief that if you forgive someone, it is the same as saying what happened to you was okay. But this isn't the case at all. Forgiveness has nothing to do with accepting or condoning behavior.

Reflect on the facts of the situation When we have been wronged, most of us tend to focus on things that support the fact that we have been wronged--things that justify our feelings. Many (but not all!) situations have shades of grey, and sometimes we lose sight of that.

What if the person won't change? It can be very hard to forgive someone who doesn't admit wrongdoing or decides they don't want to change their behavior. You cannot force someone to change. But you can choose to let your anger go, and no longer be controlled by it.

Forgiveness can be difficult, and often professional help is critical. Contact us to learn more.

Don't overdo it (you should be able to talk while you exercise).

Enlist the help of a buddy--social support makes maintaining exercise programs more successful.

Protect yourself Of course, when it starts to get really warm this summer, remember to stay hydrated, wear sunscreen and a hat, and try to avoid the hottest, sunniest hours of the day (noon to 3).

Warm up and cool down for at least 5 minutes to avoid injury.

The National Institutes of Health suggests an easy walking program (use it 3 or more times a week) that fits for most people (**remember to check with your physician if you are just beginning to exercise or if have a medical condition**):

Warm up (5 minutes) and cool down (5 minutes) by walking slowly.

Week 1: 5 minutes of brisk walking after your warm up

Week 2 and beyond: Add 2 minutes of brisk walking each week until you are briskly walking for 30 minutes.

Another option is to buy a pedometer--try to walk 6000 steps for overall health and 10000 for weight loss each day.

Optimism

Seeing the glass half full = happiness (no rocket science here!)

Did you know that in the last 30 years, psychologists have published over 46,000 journal articles about depression, and under 500 about happiness? While we don't know as much about happiness, we have covered the basics in this newsletter, and it wouldn't be complete without talking about optimism.

Optimism is not the same as being positive Many people believe that optimists see only the good in life, and "fool themselves" about the bad. There are definitely people like this in the world, but this isn't the type of optimism that helps people be happier.

Optimism is closer to accurate thinking Many people who are depressed or anxious tend to have "filters" that lead them to narrow in on things that support their thoughts. They take ambiguous situations--things that have more than one interpretation--and assume the worst. Let's say you are walking down the street and smile at someone you don't know. The depressed person who is feeling sad about inadequate social support might say "I knew it. No one likes me." The optimist might say "They mustn't have seen me" or "Oh well, I will keep trying"

Optimists see the good and the bad, and don't blame themselves if they don't need to Optimists are better able to see different explanations for situations, to focus on the positive while acknowledging the negative, and to not beat themselves up for things.

Optimism can be learned This may seem impossible if you have struggled with depression, or it may even seem like it belittles your problems. But it is actually the opposite. By learning specific ways to see the good and bad in situations, by having a balanced perspective, people can be more happy--and don't you deserve to be more happy? Contact us to learn more.



SOCIAL SUPPORT

Having good relationships generally makes us happier

But what do you do if you don't have enough of them?

There are many reasons why many of us do not have enough satisfying relationships. Our culture is, in general, very isolating compared to other parts of the world. We spend more time, on average, at work and at home, and often little time socializing. Meeting new people is difficult. This points to the first step in improving your social network:

Determine the cause.

Maybe you don't run into people very often--you lack opportunities to improve your social network. Perhaps you are shy, or even socially anxious. Making new friends (and maintaining existing friendships) can be

very difficult for people with Social Anxiety Disorder. Or perhaps you have plenty of relationships, but none of them are satisfying: Maybe you get walked over a lot, or maybe your relationships just aren't good enough. Perhaps you are depressed and avoid people in general. Determining the cause of your relationship situation is key to figuring out a solution. Remember if you are having trouble doing so, AACs has specialists who can help. Relationships (or lack thereof) is one of the most common problems that we see.

Find a solution. Determining the cause of the problem helps to produce a good solution. If it is a matter of not meeting the right people, joining a group targeting a hobby you enjoy can be a good idea. If you are socially anxious or depressed, seeking professional help is key. If you get walked over a lot, working on assertiveness can help.

Need more help? It's what we do. Call us to find out more.

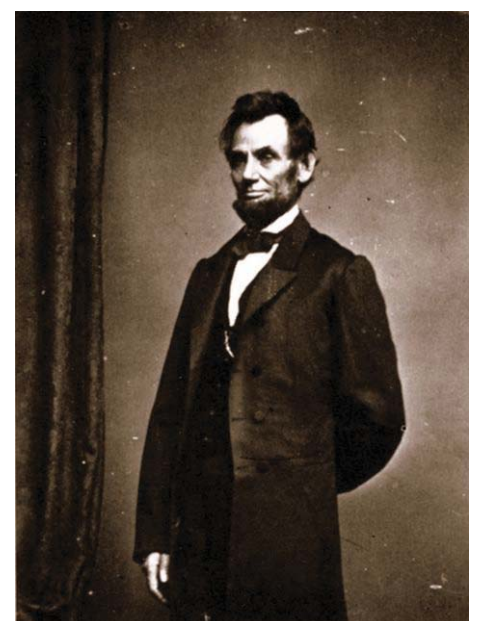
3 Steps to Reducing Overthinking

More isn't necessarily better when it comes to thinking--especially if you want to be happier

A recent study suggests that friendships and other relationships that lend themselves to thinking too much about problems may actually make us more unhappy. Excessive talking about someone else's negative qualities and dwelling on them, or talking a lot about other problems and only the negative feelings associated with them, can cause us to feel anxious and depressed, and lead us to complain even more. These findings are unexpected, especially for those of us who commonly seek social support in this way.

There is growing evidence that overthinking is generally bad for our mental health. Susan Nolan-Hoeksema, PhD, a prominent researcher in this area, likens overthinking to a "yeast effect" -- thinking kneads negativity just like dough, and continuing to think just makes negative moods grow like yeast helps dough expand. Yet stopping is easier said than done. Nolan-Hoeksema has some ideas from her book "Women who think too much" (and these ideas work equally well for men!)

Break Free of Overthinking. Understand that overthinking is not your friend. Find healthy ways to distract your-



HISTORIANS SAY ABRAHAM LINCOLN HAD SIGNIFICANT, SEVERE DEPRESSION, PERHAPS PARTLY RELATED TO OVERTHINKING

self. Practice mindfulness strategies to gain perspective on your thoughts. Schedule a thinking or worry hour, where all you do is think, and then defer any thoughts to that time. Commit your thoughts to paper. Ask a friend to help you solve a problem, if there is a problem to solve.

Move to Higher Ground. Adjust your focus--try to get some perspective and see the entire picture accurately. Think about the "shoulds" you hear in your mind, and challenge the ones that aren't helpful to you.

Avoid Future Traps. Work on your self-esteem. Build helpful social supports. Stay out of situations that are unhelpful to you, as much as possible.