

# What's your happy? Ready...

January 2015 Newsletter



Ready to conquer  
your fear?

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with your sneakers on

The joys — and job —  
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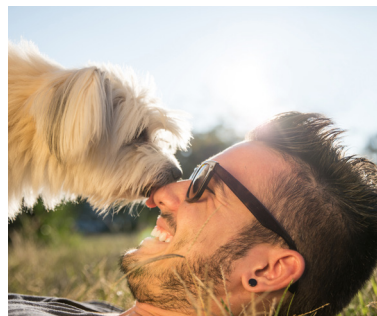
e-Thoughts — My  
New Year's resolution



Did you know you can overcome some fears by confronting them? **Learn more...**



Looking for a low-cost, warm place to exercise this winter? Here's a great idea... **More...**



Thinking about getting a pet? Sure you're ready? Try this quiz... **More...**



This year I'm resolving to do something that will make me really happy. **More...**

## Getting help

Confidential support, information and resource referrals are available for a variety of concerns — both work and personal. Call for assistance for you, your household members or your adult children under age 26, whether they live at home or not. Call or visit us online today!

# Ready to conquer your fear?

January 2016 Newsletter



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Eleanor Roosevelt said, “Do one thing every day that scares you.”<sup>1</sup> She had a good thought. Doing scary things can help you. In many cases, you can overcome your fears by confronting them.

## Your brain on fear<sup>2</sup>

When you get scared, a part of your brain called the amygdala goes into action without your even having to think about it. Your amygdala releases chemicals that make you alert and ready for action. It stimulates your heart rate so more blood flows to your muscles. That way you’re ready for “fight or flight”—the natural human fear reaction.

In case you need to protect yourself, your brain secretes a substance that blocks pain messages. It also makes you feel calmer to help avoid your being paralyzed by the fear.

After the threat has passed, your brain memorizes the whole chain of events. The next time you face a similar danger, the brain reacts even faster. You’re even a little less afraid because your brain recognizes the situation.

## Outsmarting your brain

Thanks to an approach called Exposure and Response Prevention (or ERP)<sup>2</sup>, you can use your brain’s response to beat your fear. How? ERP is based on the understanding that when you’re exposed to your fear over and over (in a controlled way), your brain becomes wired to be less and less fearful.<sup>3</sup>

ERP can be very effective for people who have anxiety issues including PTSD — anxiety resulting from a traumatic event.<sup>3</sup> But it’s not an easy or overnight process.

Here are some steps you can take if you want to try this method:

- 1. First, make a list of things that scare you.** Rank them from least to most scary. For instance, you may be afraid of the dark but even more afraid of embarrassing yourself in front of others. Put the scarier one at the top of the list.
- 2. Choose one of your lesser fears and break it down.** Work on one step at a time. For example, if you’re afraid of the dark, you would start by going into a room and dimming the lights slightly. Once you get used to that, dim them further. Stay with that until you feel comfortable. Then dim even more until you’re in the dark. Repeat the steps again and again.

Here’s what happens: at each level of dimming, your brain is going through its fear reaction. By subjecting yourself to the fear over and over, you’re training your brain to experience, learn and get desensitized to the fear a little bit at a time. You’re using your own brainpower to overcome the fear.

- 3. Get support.** It’s helpful to have a therapist, friend or someone else you trust to work with you.
- 4. Practice, be patient and persistent.** Meeting your fears head-on takes courage. Applaud each accomplishment; be kind to yourself when you take a step backward. And keep trying.

<sup>1</sup>[www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)

<sup>2</sup>[www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)

<sup>3</sup>[www.nj-act.org](http://www.nj-act.org)

# Go back to the mall... with your sneakers on

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Is winter weather putting a damper on your exercise routine? Don't be daunted by snow, ice or other poor conditions. Instead, take your exercise inside the mall.

## You've had enough of the mall, you say?

Unless you order everything online, holiday shopping can certainly lead to "mall overload". But now you can go back for a healthy dose of exercise. The benefits include:

- **It's free.** If you favor low-cost (or no-cost) exercise, you'll love mall-walking: it's on the house – or the mall, actually. Naturally, if you're a serious window shopper, there could be some expenses unrelated to your walk. But the exercise won't cost you a dime.
- **It's indoors.** It never rains, sleets or snows in the mall. Even in summer, it's a temperate place to walk. It's got smooth surfaces and lots of good views. When the store windows are transformed, you even get a change of scenery. What more could you ask for?
- **It's got social benefits.** Many malls have groups of walkers. There may be a group of seniors, moms with strollers or people recovering from injuries or illness. The mall may allow you to come before it opens so you can walk without bumping into shoppers. You can join up with a group or walk solo if you like. Some malls even run programs for their walkers. They may have speakers on health issues, rewards for miles walked, planned activities and more.
- **It's secure.** Most malls have security on staff so you can walk in a safe place. There may be a special parking area set up for early walkers. And many issue cards and badges for identification.

## Finding a mall walking group

Contact your mall and ask for the customer services or management office. You may be surprised to find out that mall walking is a well-established activity at your mall. If not, consider starting a group. Management may even help you with publicity since it's an activity that will draw people to their mall.

## Walking is great exercise

The most obvious benefit to mall walking is that you get exercise. Whether you're strolling, power-walking or going at a pace in between, walking is good for you.

Wendy Bumgardner is a certified marathon coach who writes articles about the benefits of walking. She says that walking at a moderate pace for 30-60 minutes can burn fat and build muscle.<sup>1</sup> In addition, walking can help reduce the risk of heart disease, breast cancer, colon cancer, diabetes and stroke.<sup>1</sup>

It's good for people who have osteoporosis, too. A study done by Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital found that post-menopausal women who walked 30 minutes a day cut their risk of hip fracture by 40%.<sup>2</sup> Other studies show that regular walking can help slow mental decline, improve breathing, boost energy and even help you sleep better.<sup>2</sup>

So if you're looking for a warm place to walk without setting up a treadmill at home or joining a gym, it could be the perfect answer to winter weather.

<sup>1</sup>[www.lifescrypt.com](http://www.lifescrypt.com)

<sup>2</sup>[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

# The joys — and job — of owning a pet

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It's easy to say "yes" to a cute animal on adoption day at your local pet supply store. Or to buy that "doggie in the window" in a pet shop.

If you're thinking about getting a new pet, try this quiz to explore how ready you are to take on an animal companion:

## 1. How do you feel about getting a pet?

- My kids are begging for one and I can't say no
- As long as the family helps care for it, I'll be fine
- I really want a pet

## 2. Where you currently live:

- It's pet-friendly
- Pets aren't allowed but we'll sneak ours in

## 3. I've looked into the cost of vet bills, food and other pet needs and:

- My income will cover the costs
- I'll dig into savings if I have to
- I had no idea it could be so expensive

## 4. My family has pet allergies:

- True
- False

## 5. I'm ready to make a commitment to a pet for:

- As long as the pet lives
- As long as having a pet works with our schedule

## 6. I work long hours so my pet will be fed and walked:

- By a paid pet walker or sitter
- By a neighbor, friend or family member
- By the kids if they remember – or it will need to wait until I get home from work

## 7. I'm getting a pet that needs training so:

- I'll take it to classes at an adult or animal training school
- No time for training so I'll just hope for the best

## 8. If we go on vacation or out of town, we'll take our pet:

- With us
- To a kennel or to family or friends
- Never thought about that

## There are no right or wrong answers

The quiz is meant to prompt some thoughts — and maybe a family meeting — before you get a pet. Some discussion points include:

- Even if your kids want the pet, you may wind up being the caregiver. Will you be annoyed? Are you too busy with other obligations?
- If your family has allergies, choose a pet that doesn't create a health issue in your house.
- If pets aren't allowed where you live, are you willing to pay fines, give up the pet or move if your "secret" is discovered?
- Pets can be costly. Call a local vet to find out how much checkups, shots and sick visits are. Consider food, toys, boarding and other expenses. Be careful not to take on more than you can handle.
- Owning a pet is a commitment. Pets – like people – can get sick and need more help from you. Can you commit to care for your pet through thick and thin?

## Your pet deserves responsible care

It's a big decision to bring a pet into your life. To prevent disappointment, return or abandonment of your pet, think ahead. Be sure to think about living in your home from a pet's perspective, too. It can't hurt to let "Is your home a good match for this pet" be as high on your list as "Is this pet a good match for my family and home?"

# e-Thoughts — My New Year's resolution

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*Our e-Thoughts feature provides close-up views on topics and areas of interest from everyday life.*

This year I'm not resolving to lose 50 pounds, look 10 years younger or change the world. I'm resolving to do something pretty simple: read more.

I love to read but I often have excuses why I can't. There's the "lack of" excuse — meaning mostly time and energy. And then there's the "too much" excuse: too much laundry to do, too much work or too much of just about anything.

But I realize I'm only cheating myself by not reading. Like my daily exercise, shower and meals, reading should be part of my routine. Why? Reading makes me really happy.

It breaks up boredom, opens my mind to new ideas and makes me feel better about myself. Books are a great conversation starter too. So even though reading is a solitary activity, it actually helps me be more social.

My goal for 2016 is to read two books per month. I hope I can beat that, but I'll be happy if I achieve it.

What are your goals for the New Year? Are they things that will make you feel happy and better about yourself? Let's all give it our best shot!

# What's your happy? *Ready...*

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