

What's your happy? Reflect...

October 2016 Newsletter



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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!

Better living through reflection

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How often do you just stop what you're doing and reflect on your day, your work or your life? Once a day? Once a week? Once a month?

Many people would say it's impossible or impractical to take a regular time out for reflection. Yet it's a habit that can have major payoffs.

A few minutes can lead to big benefits

Reflection is an easy practice that packs a lot of power. Just making time to be still and think can help you:

- 1. Figure out what's working for you...and what's not.** Steve Jobs said, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards."¹ When you reflect, you think about your past experiences and learn from your own mistakes and successes. Your history becomes a tool to learn what worked, what didn't and what changes you can make in the future.
- 2. Recognize your achievements.** Our failures often seem to make more lasting impressions on us than our successes. Both have their value. But remembering to reflect on your successes — and not dwell on your failures — boosts your self-esteem and motivates you to take on more growth.
- 3. Feel happier and more in control of your life.** Reflecting means taking a step back to look at things. You can often get a different perspective than when you're caught in the middle of something.

That can make today's problems seem smaller and more manageable in the overall picture of life. When you recall happy, exciting things, it can add joy and pleasure to your day.

What are some ways to reflect?

It may not be enough to just say you're going to set aside time to think each day. You may benefit from having a tool or strategy to help. Here are two examples:

- **Work out or exercise.** One of the benefits of running, walking, swimming or doing other exercise is that you usually don't need to think too much about what you're doing. That leaves an opening to use the time for reflection.
- **Begin a "one sentence journal."** Journaling can be very daunting for people; it can seem like homework to sit down and write a long, detailed summary of your day. Gretchen Rubin, who wrote **The Happiness Project**, came up with the idea of a one sentence journal.²

She suggests writing one sentence each day. That sentence can sum up your day, express your feelings or say whatever you'd like. One sentence is the expectation, but you may write more if you like. How does this help reflection? It provides a fast and easy way to look back and capture the "takeaway" from each day.²

Use reflection in your own way

Whatever method you choose, reflect on a regular basis. Try to do it daily, at the same time each day. You'll find it self-affirming, calming and enlightening.

¹www.brainyquotes.com

²www.gretchenrubin.com

Mood boosters: We all need them sometimes

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Having a bad morning or being in a funk happens from time to time. Need help to shake off that “waking up on the wrong side of the bed” mood when it strikes? Read on for some tips:

Remember: You’re in charge of you

- **You control your emotions.** Other people’s actions or words may affect you. But you’re in control of how deeply and how long you allow yourself to feel hurt, angry or sad.
- **When a bad mood strikes, see if you can figure out why.** If you can identify the “trigger,” it may help lift your mood and prevent recurrences from that source.

Be proactive

When you’re in a bad way, you may not feel like doing much of anything. But there are ways to raise your spirits. Here are just a few ideas:

- **Connect.** Call a trusted friend and vent or cry. Get it out of your system.
- **Move.** Exercise is a natural mood booster. Any kind can work.
- **Go out.** Go to the park, the mall or the library. It doesn’t matter where: just go. You’ll get your mind off yourself and you’re likely to wind up interacting with others — another natural mood booster.

- **Go “inside.”** Learn how to meditate. Sit quietly, calm your thoughts, relax your body and concentrate on your breathing. Meditation can be a powerful tool for soothing and de-stressing.
- **Act it out.** Believe it or not, one good way to get past a bad mood is to act happy. Once you’re “in costume” — showered, dressed and even forcing a smile — you can actually start to feel it!

Be prepared for next time

Once your mood has lifted, take notes. Pick a time when you’re in a good mood and make a list of things that make you happy. Do you like to walk in the woods, cuddle with your puppy, play with your kids, read or do puzzles? Write it all down.

This is your “happy list.” Next time you’re feeling down, look back at your list and use what you’ve learned to take control of your mood.

But remember: Occasional blahs are not the same as persistent blues. If you think you may be depressed, contact your doctor or Employee Assistance Program. Depression is a treatable condition. If you think you may be depressed, it’s important to reach out for help.

Step lively... and often

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Do you know about the “10,000 steps” initiative? ¹ The goal is to help improve fitness. It encourages us all to take 10,000 steps each day. But how does that translate to your everyday life?

One mile is about 2,000-2,500 steps, depending on the length of your stride. So 10,000 steps equal about 5 miles.

But the point isn't to take one long walk and then sit the rest of the day. The goal is to be more active throughout the day.

Walking gives you time to reflect

Taking a walk during the day isn't just good for physical fitness. It also gives you time to think and reflect. Some people say that it's like giving their brain a chance to “stretch”.

Do you have a sedentary lifestyle?

Do you work at a desk or computer? When you come home, do you surf the net to relax? These answers can give you an idea of how many steps you're not taking each day.

Being sedentary can be risky for your health. An inactive lifestyle may contribute to depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, sleep problems and other health issues. ²

Find out how many steps you're taking

Invest in a pedometer, fitness wristband or simply download a free “step counter” app on your phone. You don't need to spend a lot. You just need a way to count how many steps you take.

Wear or carry your pedometer, wristband or phone all day for two weeks. Go about your normal routine and record the number of steps you've taken at the end of each day. (Some apps will do this

for you.) After two weeks, you'll have a good idea of your average activity level.

Note: 10,000 steps may not be a sensible goal for you. Don't be put off. Just determine your average number of steps and try to increase them each week until you meet your goal. If you have a disability, you can find other ways to measure your fitness and activity. ³

Also, check with your doctor before starting any new fitness plan. And always add exercise gradually to help avoid injury.

Ready, set, go...

There are many simple ways to increase your steps:

- 1. Stand up every 30 minutes.** Set an alarm to go off every half hour. Stretch or walk around for 2-5 minutes.
- 2. Walk while you're on the phone.** Talk time can also be walk time.
- 3. Take the stairs.** Choose the stairs instead of the elevator.
- 4. Leave the best parking space for someone else.** If it's safe to do so, park at a distance to add steps when you go to work, the mall or the supermarket.
- 5. Make things less convenient.** Arrange your workspace so you have to get up to get a drink of water or do work-related tasks.

Enjoy the sights and sounds of fall weather. Get out and go for a walk!

¹www.thewalkingsite.com

²www.americashealthrankings.org

³www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles

e-Thoughts —

“Just say yes. Just say no.”

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

“Just say yes. Just say no” are two recommendations from the book, *The Happiness Project* by Gretchen Rubin. I can’t wait to read it. I learned about it when I was researching this month’s article on reflection. It sounds terrific.

The full title is actually: *The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun*. That title makes me smile and I haven’t even opened the book yet.

Getting back to “Just say yes. Just say no”: Those are two of Rubin’s suggestions for getting happier. Some of her others are “Let it go,” “Act the way you want to feel,” “Lighten up,” and “Make your bed.” I know I’m just skimming the surface here, but I can really identify with the author. Any one of those ideas would totally make me a happier person.

I think the point is that it doesn’t really take much. It’s about attitude. If you want to be happier, you can do it. It’s within your reach. Try reading Rubin’s book or another book on optimism or happiness. You may find suggestions that you find easy and impactful!

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