

## How to be happy

Have you noticed how some people just seem to be happier than others, even though they have many of the same problems and challenges? Although the meaning of happiness varies from person to person and from culture to culture, all human beings have the capacity to be happy. According to American psychologist Martin Seligman, happiness is part of our overall well-being, but happiness *alone* doesn't enable us to flourish. It does not allow us to build deep, lasting relationships with others, feel pleasure, or contribute meaningfully to our communities and to the world. In fact, his belief is that happiness (or "positive emotion") is just one of five elements that, together, allow us to build a fulfilling life. The other four are engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.

## Tips and tools you can use

In the same way that our brains develop learning patterns, we can also develop gratitude, resilience, optimism and meaning in our lives. Resilience and optimism alone have been shown to reduce our annual chance of dying by 20 percent! Here are some tips to help you flourish:

- Every day write down three things that went well and why they went well.
- Plan a list of enjoyable things you would like to do more often. Schedule them into your calendar and commit to follow through with them.
- Make a list of people who make you happy and plan to spend more time with them. If some of these people are now far away from you, plan how you can be in touch with them more often or more effectively. In addition to email and phone calls, consider whether occasional audio or web chats would add more value to your communications.
- Consider your personal growth goals and make a commitment to ongoing learning and developing new skills.
- Endeavor to perform every task to the best of your ability.

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- Get physically active. Exercise releases endorphins, which leads to a sense of wellbeing. Whether it's in a club, on your own, indoors or outdoors, there are lots of ways to get active. Pick something you are most likely to enjoy and to commit to over time.
- Begin 'positive self-talk'.
- Find meaning in your life, whether that is being part of a faith community, volunteering, or developing your virtues.
- Set realistic goals. Start with one positive goal for each day. Think about what you can do to change or prevent negative experiences from happening again.
- Reflect on whether you are trying to do too much. If you find that you are going through the day without taking the time or finding the energy to think about what you are doing and about happiness, ask yourself, "how can I change?"

### **Being grateful**

- Every day, write down a few things for which you are deeply grateful.
- Try not to limit your thinking to the extreme terms, "never", "always", "everything", and "nothing". Building resilience and optimism is important. Don't be scared to fail and always "try, try again".
- Learn from children, for whom a pretty stone or shell can be a precious treasure.
- Appreciate life. Enjoy the rain; it will be hot and sunny again soon enough. Identify a role model for yourself—alive, deceased, famous, not famous, real or fictional. Someone you admire and who seems to have achieved the goals or the attitude you strive for. When in doubt, ask yourself what your role model would do or say in the same circumstance.
- Commit to looking for both big and small events/circumstances that are positive. This will give you the strength to tackle the negative.

### **The power of laughter**

- Remember that, like exercise, laughter releases endorphins.
- Start by exercising your smiling muscles. Put on a smile at least once a day.
- Share humor and joy with family and friends.
- Broaden your horizons, try something new and don't take it too seriously if you fail. It's okay to sing off key, fall off your bike, or make a funny painting.

### **Time for yourself**

- Make time just for yourself every day. Be mindful of your attitudes and experiences.
- When it comes to taking time for you, it's not always quantity that counts, but quality. There are many ways to create quality time:
  - Praying
  - Meditating and reflecting

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- Visualizing
- Making or listening to music
- Gardening (indoor or outdoor)
- Taking physical care, such as grooming yourself, cleaning, or exercising
- Seeking a positive environment, such as being in nature, enjoying the company of good friends or listening to those who inspire you
- Preparing good food, getting a massage for weary muscles and a weary brain, or buying a present for yourself

## **Time for others**

- Helping others often creates positive feelings and brings meaning to our lives.
- Building and maintaining meaningful relationships is important for emotional wellbeing.
- Keeping up relationships with people who have crossed your path is also important:
  - Recognize people as individuals, not just as part of a group or family
  - Be prepared to practice forgiveness
  - Meet with someone you haven't seen in a while
  - Connect with an aging or ill relative or friend
  - Help someone by looking after their children so they have time to themselves
  - Contribute to a worthy cause

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## Recovery is possible

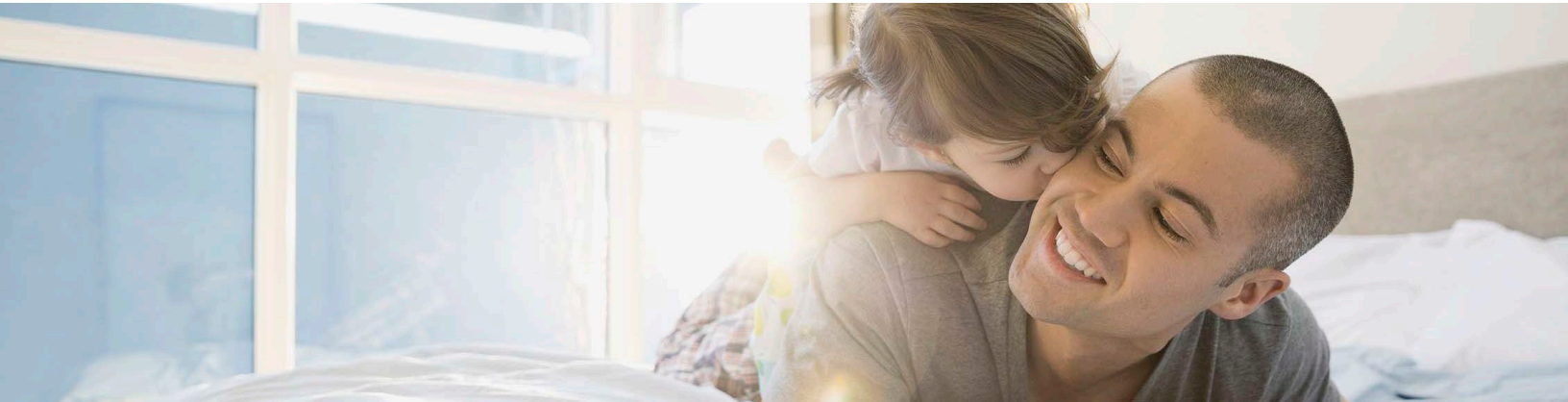
If you or someone you love is struggling to overcome addiction to alcohol or drugs, you know how difficult the journey to recovery can be. This article offers ten helpful reminders for those on the road to recovery.

1. **Believe in yourself.** Once you have made the decision to give up alcohol or drugs and are ready to change, you begin the recovery process. It is difficult and requires strength and believing in and loving yourself. You might consider writing a personal affirmation statement—a simple, positive sentence or two about yourself, such as “I’m proud of myself. I can do this.” Think of it as your personal self-esteem booster. Keep your statement on your phone or on a piece of paper in your wallet and refer to it regularly.
2. **Rely on professional help.** One of the most important steps you can take to give yourself the best chance for recovery is to enlist the help of trained professionals. They can not only help you deal with the addiction challenges you are facing, but also the emotional or mental health issues you may need help addressing.
3. **Remember that there will be ups and downs, setbacks, and relapses.** Relapse is likely for everyone in recovery, and especially if you are going through it for the first time. Not everyone relapses, but if you do, recognize it and reach out to your supports for help to get back on track. Recovery takes time, patience, and work. Keep your expectations realistic so you don’t set yourself up for disappointment.
4. **Seek support from family and friends.** We all need human connection, especially during times of crisis and difficulty. Studies show that support is essential for those in recovery. Build a support system of people with whom you can be honest and who you know believe in you and support your recovery. Avoid isolating yourself. Let your circle of trusted family and friends know you could use their support.
5. **Join and participate in a support group.** Most addiction programs offer access to recovery support groups. Join one of these. Addiction specialists agree that support groups can be a powerful and positive tool for those in recovery and provide ongoing support over the long-term. Some people attend 12-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. While these work for some people, they are not right for everyone. You might also try a SMART Recovery group meeting. These work on a 4-point system based on scientific knowledge about addiction. If you prefer a group that is not spiritually based, you might try a Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS.) meeting.
6. **Establish healthy daily routines to help you stay focused on your recovery goals.** Structure your day to make sure sobriety remains a priority and keep your schedule simple. Maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle. Eat a healthy diet. Adopt an exercise routine. (Exercise releases endorphins, which can make you feel good.) Pursue new interests and hobbies that give you pleasure. Actions such as these will help you build a healthy new life. “You don’t recover from an addiction by stopping using,” writes Dr. Steven Melemis in this article at [addictionsandrecovery.org](http://addictionsandrecovery.org). “You recover by creating a new life where it is easier to not use.”

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7. **Keep busy and stay productive.** “Everyone who’s ever attempted sobriety can attest to the fact that boredom is a major trigger with enormous relapse potential,” writes Denise Fournier in this [Psychology Today article](#). That’s why it’s very important to stay busy and productive, whether it is with work, volunteering, or other activities. Note that overwork can be a sign of an addictive personality and people in recovery should be mindful of this.
8. **Find healthy ways to unwind and manage stress.** One reason people use alcohol and drugs is to relax and push away stress, but this is not a healthy response and can be detrimental to health and well-being. Instead, try to engage in activities such as walking, exercising, listening to music, or practicing deep breathing or mindfulness exercises.
9. **Find a sense of purpose.** We all need meaning in our lives, and to use our talents and abilities to reach our potential. Otherwise, we’re likely to feel dissatisfied. Purpose may come from work, volunteering, caring for family, doing for others, or other actions that allow you to realize your potential. Spending time with others who live a life of purpose can inspire you to do the same.
10. **Focus on what you’re gaining by giving up alcohol or drugs.** Picture the new you. Improved health. More positive relationships. Higher self-esteem. Improved performance at work. And a life where the future looks clear and you’re in charge!

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