



Simple

MINDFULNESS

Daily checklist for growing
your happiness

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Step 1: Daily gratitude

- Write ten things for which you're grateful. Describe each item in detail and why you're grateful for it.
- Throughout your day, notice the little things that make your day a bit brighter. Say a silent 'thank you' that you've been blessed in that moment.
- At the end of your day, reflect on what went right and acknowledge what it took for those good things to happen (help from others, a lucky break, your hard work, etc.).

Step 2: Find balance

- Look at your relationships, career, finances, spirituality, hobbies, health, creativity, leisure. What areas need more or less of your attention?
- Identify one small step you can take to bring things more in balance. Ideas include:
 - putting a dollar in a jar every day to save money
 - meditate for five minutes
 - take a short walk
 - spend 15 minutes on a hobby you've put aside for far too long
 - make a phone call
 - eat a healthier meal
- At the end of each week, reflect on your week to see how those baby steps have helped. Take some quiet time to journal. Listen to your heart for the next steps to take.

Step 3: Change your outlook

- Take 30 seconds to smile or laugh out loud, especially if you don't feel like it. Changing your physical state changes your state of mind. This reminds you that things aren't so bad and to not take life too seriously. You'll be surprised at the results.
- Play
 - play with your kids or grandkids
 - sit outside to simply enjoy the day
 - read something fun for the joy of it
 - practice a hobby or anything creative that you tend to push aside for later (but that 'later' never comes)
- Honor that part of you that's tired of being pushed aside for later. That side of you is your True Self, the part that needs to be honored in order for you to feel balanced and happy.

Bonus Step

Brighten someone's day by complementing them on something specific or let them know why you appreciate them. Don't expect anything in return.

How to Be Happy When Unhappy Is Your Norm



Is it possible to be happy *all* the time?

And a bigger question: Would you want to be happy all the time? How would that feel? Would you feel like you don't deserve it? Or do you think it's impossible?

Society says that if you achieve your goals, if you're ["successful" \(whatever that means\)](#), you can be happy. At least that's the story. But it's a lie. That kind of happiness is fleeting. It's based on externals – things you can't control.

True happiness – not that fleeting, giddy feeling - is more like an inner contentment that comes from within you. It's a choice that's completely

within your control.

I've dealt with a mild to moderate depression for most of my life. I was waiting for everything I dreamed of to come together perfectly before I could be happy. I had to achieve all the goals I laid out for myself. I had to be the person that I thought everyone wanted – expected – me to be. I had to [be enough](#). That day never came no matter how hard I tried. Whatever I did or achieved wasn't enough. The more elusive it was, the more depressed I became.

One day I read about [gratitude lists](#) and journals and thought I would give the idea a shot. At first, it was tough to think of ten things for which I was grateful. But I stuck with the practice every day. Like any practice, when you do it daily, you don't realize the impact that all those baby steps are making.

Before I knew it, my gratitude lists went for pages each day. It was hard to stop. In that process, I began to notice that I wasn't feeling as depressed. I was beginning to see the silver lining in situations. I could see what was right with people and situations instead of what was wrong. I began to feel happy more often.

After going through [a happiness course](#), I learned that a daily gratitude practice is one of the core tenets of lasting happiness. The other tenets are balance, creating a positive outlook and letting go of pride or ego.

Balance

Balance begins with looking at all aspects of your life to see where you're not in balance. Maybe you work too much and play or exercise too little. Look at your relationships, career, finances, spirituality, hobbies, health, creativity, leisure. What areas need more or less of your attention?

Balance also requires you to take time each week to reflect on how your life is going, how you feel. This is the step where you listen to your heart, that part of you that is usually swept into the background so you can focus on "more important" things. There couldn't be anything more important to your happiness than what your heart, your True Self, has to say.

Create a Positive Outlook

Creating a positive outlook is about making time each day to laugh and play.

As adults, we usually don't laugh much. Rather than waiting for something funny to come up in the day, laughter exercises (like laughter yoga) ask that you simply laugh for no reason. The more you do it (and get over the embarrassment factor), the more you want to do it and the easier it becomes. Watch out! It can be contagious if you're around willing friends.

Over the past couple weeks, I've been working on the positive outlook part to balance all the work I'm compelled to accomplish [to feel productive](#).

Playing can mean playing with your kids or grandkids, sitting outside to simply enjoy the day or reading something fun for the joy of it. Play also includes hobbies or anything creative that you tend to push aside for later, but that 'later' never comes.

In order to experience happiness, you must honor that part of yourself that's tired of being pushed aside for later. That side of you is your True Self, the part that needs to be honored in order for you to feel balanced and happy.

I initially found this challenging. My monkey mind can always find 'better' or 'more constructive' things to do. But the more I override that feeling and honor the time I've set aside for my True Self, the better I feel. I have a better attitude and more energy to do those 'more constructive' things if I do things that feed my heart first.

To reinforce your improved outlook, at the end of each day, write down at least one thing that went well. You may start to forget about the benefits of feeding your soul first if you don't take the time each day to reflect on what you did and how wonderful it made you feel. It's a way to reward yourself and feel the good feelings again. Give yourself that gift.

Letting Go of Ego

The final area, letting go of pride/ego, involves looking past yourself and your own needs to see the bigger picture. In my shift from depression to happiness, this has been critical. Anytime I feel down, instead of focusing on which of my needs and expectations aren't being met – which makes me unhappier, I [focus on helping others](#) or doing more active things to get out of my head.

Activities in this area include taking an 'awe walk,' active listening, and writing in your [gratitude journal](#).

An 'awe walk' is mindful walking. It doesn't matter where you walk. During each moment of your walk, notice everything in your environment and realize how amazing it is. Even if it's concrete, you can marvel at what it took for someone to lay out a neat, paved path for you: the people who work in the quarry where the sand was sourced, the people who work in the concrete plant, the drivers of the trucks who delivered the bags of concrete from the plant to where you're walking, the people who poured the concrete and those who carefully smoothed the surface by hand. Marvel at the leaves on the trees, the rain or snow, the blue sky, clouds, buildings, wildlife – everything. When you think about it, nothing around you is mundane. Nothing can be taken for granted.

Active listening involves putting yourself and that voice in your head aside while you truly listen to another person. Put yourself in their shoes. Feel compassion for them. Try to see the world through the lens of their lifetime of personal experiences. While they're speaking, don't think about your judgments of what they're saying or how you'll respond. Simply focus on what they're trying to communicate. When they're done speaking, reflect back what they said to ensure that you understand what they said. Then take a moment to consider how you'll respond. This process helps the other person feel heard and accepted, something all of us would like to feel more often.

Daily Practice

While some of these activities might require some effort and thought at first, once you make them a habit, either daily or weekly, their benefits will begin to reward you with that inner happiness that you thought was so elusive. The practices will begin to change the way you think and the way you see the world.

When my children were babies and toddlers, it was very difficult to make the time to write in my gratitude journal. I didn't have the luxury of taking ten or thirty minutes to write. Since I had already established the practice before I had kids (but still led a busy life), my mindset had shifted to see and notice things for which I was grateful throughout my day. I would silently say a little 'thank you' to the Universe for gifting me with whatever I noticed.

That mindset and practice have stayed with me as my children have grown. Now I verbalize more of what I notice when I'm around them. They love it when I let them know how grateful I am for all of their little nuances and their

sweet ways of being and actions. I'm also trying to be an example for them, showing them that we can't take anything for granted.

Being happy is completely possible and in your power. It requires that you set and hold the intention to be happy no matter what.

If you're coming from a mostly unhappy place like I did, it will take time to shift your old mindsets and see yourself and your environment in a new light. This is where mindfulness comes in. You can't change what you can't see.

Noticing your negative thoughts, beliefs, and actions as you go through your day is the first step toward changing them. The practices described above can help you to notice your negativity as it resists any change.

Your [negative monkey mind](#) may tell you that these practices are a stupid waste of time. It may say, "You've been writing a gratitude list for a whole week and you're not any happier. See! I told you it wouldn't work." See your monkey for what it is: a screeching, fear-filled little being that flips out whenever you try anything different, even if that 'something different' can help you. It doesn't understand 'good' or 'bad.' It only understands 'same' and 'different,' and it hates different.

Mindfully notice your monkey, watch it screech for a while then get back to your happiness practices. From my own experience, I can tell you that it takes time and a little effort but it's so worth it. You're worth it. May you be happy.

A bright sun in a blue sky with white clouds. The sun is in the upper left quadrant, creating a lens flare effect. The sky is a deep blue, and there are several white, fluffy clouds scattered across the scene.

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To learn more about living a
happier life, check out the Simple
Mindfulness blog

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