

Key Terms

Social comparison: the idea that we decide how well we are doing by comparing ourselves to others.

Gratitude: being thankful / grateful.

Mind wandering: a natural feature of the mind, whereby we stop focusing on the present activity and start thinking about the past, future and other people.

Relive: to experience bad events as though they are happening again

Regret: to wish we had done things differently

Ruminate: cows ruminate when they bring up food and chew it again. Humans ruminate when they bring up bad events and think them over again.

Catastrophise: we imagine a disaster (a catastrophe) is going to happen.

Mindfulness: a strategy which can help us focus on now and stop mind wandering.

Sleep deprivation: not having enough sleep usually defined as less than 7 hours a night)

Things that **don't** make us happy (but we think they do):

- Social media
- Good job
- Lots of money
- Awesome stuff
- True love
- Perfect body
- Perfect grades



Things that **do** make us happy (but we think they don't):

- Gratitude
- Kindness
- Mindfulness
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Social connection



Science of Happiness

Social media: Solutions to social comparison

1. Take time off social media. Sounds radical, but this can make us a lot happier.
 2. Remind yourself that social media is not real. People don't post the bad stuff that is going on for them. Only the good stuff and some of that isn't real.
 3. Practice gratitude
- Reminding ourselves of all the things in our life that are good, stops us focusing on the negative social comparisons.

Gratitude

In one study they asked people to write down every day what they were grateful for. They found:

- People felt their life as a whole was better
- People felt the next week was going to be better
- Physical symptoms of pain were less
- People made healthier choices e.g. physical exercise

In another study they asked volunteers to write a letter to someone they were grateful for and then give the letter to them. This made people happier 6 months later.

Kindness

Most people predict, they would be happier if they spent money on themselves rather than someone else. However, it turns out spending money on other people makes you happier than spending it on yourself

One study in 2006 found that happier people:

- Think about doing more kind things
- Remember their kind acts more
- Do more kind things than those who are unhappy

Another study in 2005, showed that:

- People who did 5 acts of kindness in one day, increased the happiness the most
- People who did 5 acts of kindness on different days increased their happiness, but not by as much.

Mindfulness

Our minds wander 47% of the time. When our mind wanders, we think about the past, the future and what other people think of us. But not, the present!

When we think about the past we...

- Relive: we experience bad events as though they are happening again
- Regret: think about things we wish we had done differently
- Ruminates: cows ruminate when they bring up food and chew it again. Humans ruminate when they bring up bad events and think them over again.

When we mind wander and think about the future we...

- Worry
- Catastrophise: we imagine a disaster (a catastrophe is going to happen)

Mindfulness is a strategy which can help us focus on now and stop mind wandering. The more mindfulness we practice, the more we learn not to mind wander.

<https://www.mindful.org/how-to-meditate/>

Sleep: Scientific Health Benefits of Sleep

- Not getting enough sleep is linked to fat. Children are 89% more likely to be obese if they do not get enough sleep. People who get more sleep, eat less
- Cortisol (the stress hormone) is associated with a lack of sleep
- Improves the immune system. People who slept less than 7 hours a night are three times more likely to develop a cold than those sleeping 8 hours or more.
- Sleeping helps to improve learning.
- Good sleep lowers the risk of developing depression
- Sleep helps us to empathise with others
- Sleep improves athletic performance

Strategies to help sleep

Things to avoid

Drop in temperature (hot bath before bed)

Too much heat (turn heat off, avoid heated blankets)

Focus on breathing

Napping in the day

Reading (as long as its not electronic)

Electronics (e.g. mobile phone)

Only use bedroom for sleep

Caffeine after 6pm

Keep to regular sleeping and rising schedule

Alcohol

Herbal tea (esp. chamomile, valerian, hops)

Hot milky drinks (incl hot chocolate, Horlicks)

Exercise (but not too close to bedtime)

Exercise

In an experiment in 2000, they divided 156 people with depression into 3 groups:

Group 1: exercised 3 times a week for 30 minutes

Group 2: took medicine (anti-depressant Zoloft)

Group 3: exercised and took the medicine

After 16 weeks, the group who only did exercise saw the best improvement in happiness (90% fully recovered)

When we exercise, we produce lots of hormones, which contribute to making us feel good. These hormones have two affects: They:

- increase positive emotions
- decrease negative emotions

One 'dose' of exercise can improve your mood for several hours. Regular exercise can improve your mood long-term

Government guidance is that teenagers do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. However, if you are only interested in improving your happiness, you don't need as much as that. Every time you do exercise there will be an improvement in your mood e.g. walking for 5 minutes or moving for 3 minutes to your favourite song. To get the long-term benefits, you need to do 15 to 20 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week. Aerobic forms of exercise (such as jogging, running, swimming) seem to be the most effective.

Goal Setting

Wish: what is your goal (your wish)? Be precise.

Outcome: what is the best thing (outcome) about fulfilling your wish? What would be the main feeling you would have if this wish came true?

Obstacles: what could get in the way of you achieving your wish?

Plan: what can you do to overcome your obstacle? Make an 'if-then' plan.