

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How to be happier through positive psychology

Is it possible to use science to become happier? While joy often feels like a spur of the moment emotion, you have the power to be a happy person. Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that explores happiness and fulfillment. Like traditional psychology, positive psychology takes a scientific approach to understanding the inner workings of the mind and the factors that influence your state of mental well-being. By using positive psychology in various areas of your life, you can feel happier and more fulfilled.

An experiment conducted by Richard Wiseman demonstrated how individuals play a significant role in creating their happiness. In *Make Your Own Luck*, Wiseman set up two individuals, one who described himself as lucky and the other who described herself as unlucky, to experience two 'lucky' opportunities: 1) He planted money on the ground and 2) he created a chance encounter with a successful businessman. The self-proclaimed *lucky* person pocketed the money and engaged with the businessman, while the self-proclaimed *unlucky* person avoided both the money and the businessman. Who do you think is happier overall - the lucky person or the unlucky one? Do you believe that each had a role in his or her own luck and happiness?

Six techniques for cultivating happiness

- **Make your own luck** – This may mean becoming more observant and more willing to take risks. Imagine the potential opportunities the 'lucky' person may have unlocked by chatting with the businessman in the example above. Those same opportunities were completely bypassed by the 'unlucky' person who chose to avoid the interaction.
- **Become more adaptable** – Flexibility can make stressful situations less so, as well as help you feel better about your choices. The old saying, "go with the flow" applies here. However, it's not just a matter of giving in; it's also a matter of learning how to think about a situation from various viewpoints. This can give you a broader understanding of and appreciation for different perspectives.
- **Try new experiences** – While you may be reasonably content in your comfort zone, trying new experiences could be gratifying. By trying something different, you are also putting yourself in a position to discover new opportunities, new friends, and new favorites.
- **Stay positive** – Optimism has been researched extensively and is extremely powerful. It can help you get through difficult work, social, and life challenges and may even protect you from both physical and mental illness. In addition, people who are in a good mood tend to be more visually aware, while those in bad moods or a state of anxiety tend to block out peripheral details and focus on whatever is bothering them.
- **Dive into fiction** – Read a good book or take in a movie and take a mini-vacation from reality. Good stories and strong characters can evoke emotions, give you hope, and allow you to experience situations similar and dissimilar to those in your own life. In fact, a technique known as cinema therapy is sometimes used by therapists to help patients gain perspective.
- **Explore your organization's employee and family assistance program** – If your company offers an employee and family assistance program, you and your family have access to free resources that you can tap into to improve your mental well-being using both traditional and positive psychology. Instead of waiting for a mental condition to manifest itself before taking advantage of these resources, be proactive in getting support and accessing a range of services that will help you.

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Do you want to be the person who sees opportunity, grasps it and lives a happy and fulfilling life or the person who ignores it and blames it on bad luck? Use positive psychology to become happier and luckier.