

Healthy Living Resources

- Your team at GF Strong – social work, psychology, chaplain, alcohol and drug counsellor, recreation therapist, dietician etc...
- Community counseling – ask a social worker for more info
 - E.g. Family Services of Greater Vancouver
- FREE online relaxation exercises

QuitNow 1-877-455-2233 www.quitnow.ca	Quit Now services is a free resource for British Columbians wanting help to quit smoking. Free phone or internet based support.
Healthlink BC Call: 811 http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/	Dieticians, Nurses and pharmacists 24 hours nurses available. Healthy living info on website
Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions http://www.coag.uvic.ca/cdsmp/schedules.htm	Free 6 week group workshop adults with chronic conditions. Includes free book. Will give you skills, confidence and tools to help manage your health. Offered throughout greater Vancouver. Also offer Pain management workshops.
Volunteer Vancouver http://govolunteer.ca/ info@govolunteer.ca	Website that connects potential volunteers and organizations looking for volunteers.
Bounce Back – Reclaim Your Health Canadian Mental Health Association 1-866-639-0522 bounceback@cmha.bc.ca http://www.cmha.bc.ca/how-we-can-help/adults/bounceback/participantinfo	Bounce Back is program to help people experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety that may arise from stress or other life circumstances. Offers a DVD video providing tips on managing mood and healthy living or a guided self-help program with telephone support are offered. Referral by doctor. No cost.
Alcohol & Drug Info & Referral Service 1-800-663-1441 Lower Mainland: (604) 660-9382	This service is available to people across B.C. needing help with any kind of substance abuse issues 24 hours a day. It provides information and referral to education, prevention and treatment services.

Prepared by: Jenny Puterman, MSW, 604-737-6264, jennifer.puterman@vch.ca

The Top Twelve Scientifically-Proven Happiness Strategies

We are all searching for happiness these days and advice on how to find it abounds. But how do we know what really works and, more importantly, how do we know what is going to work *for us*?

Luckily, the scientific community has been working hard on these questions and they are beginning to come up with some answers. First, scientists have confirmed what we all know by now to be true and that is that money doesn't buy happiness and neither does that new car, the vacation at the beach, the big wedding, the job promotion or the face-lift – not *lasting* happiness anyway. On the other hand, scientists have also found at least twelve strategies that do, in fact, lead to sustainable increases in happiness. The trick is first, to know what they are and how to employ them and, second, to know which ones will work best *for you*.

First, let's take a look at the top 12 scientifically-proven happiness strategies. Here they are:

Practicing Gratitude

It seems that focusing on what you do have rather than what you don't have, and being thankful for it is a valid strategy for increasing your own happiness. Practicing gratitude can take many forms, but here are a few ideas. Set aside some time before bed each night to make a mental list of what you can be grateful for that day. If you write in a journal, use Sunday's page (or any day of your choosing) to write a list of what you have to be thankful for that week. Offer up a prayer of thanks before meals (to God or to the many folks who are responsible for getting food from the farm to your table). Set aside time to write thank you notes, not just in response to gifts, but in response to any kindness whether current or long ago.

Vary your approach and schedule in practicing this strategy (and all the others as well). Keep it fresh and it will have more of an impact on you.

Cultivating a More Optimistic Outlook

Optimism doesn't come easily to all of us, but it is something that we can work on. Optimistic thinkers are more confident, they are more likely to give themselves credit when things go well and to blame failures on external circumstances, they are more likely to persist in their efforts to achieve goals and are generally more hopeful about the future. There are a variety of ways to go about cultivating optimism. For more information on that read [The Pursuit of Happiness](#) and follow the links provided.

Avoiding Rumination and Social Comparison

Ruminating, or rehashing our flaws and failures, serves no purpose other than lowering our spirits and our self-esteem. The simplest approach to avoiding these negative thoughts

processes is to catch ourselves in the act and simply distract ourselves with something else. Have a catch-phrase that you will say to yourself like “Oops, there I go again” and then a preplanned distraction that you can readily employ in any situation. Sing a favorite song to yourself, repeat a soothing mantra or do anything else that might keep your attention for a few minutes. You might also put off your worrying, ruminating or comparing until later – set aside 10 minutes at night specifically for that purpose. However you choose to conquer these tendencies, the key factor is developing an awareness of them. For more information read “[How to Keep Your Cool When the Heat is On](#),” “[7 Tips for Keeping Things in Perspective](#)” “[Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing](#)” or “[The Strength to be Yourself](#).”

Building Social Networks

Studies have shown that people who have supportive social networks (not necessarily large, just supportive) tend to be healthier and happier. You can increase or improve your own social networks by making a point of keeping in touch with family members, joining clubs, attending church or community functions, working on your marriage and any number of other ways. Maintaining contact with others, being there for them when they need you and knowing that you have people who will be there for you as well, has been shown to improve happiness and well-being. And for those of us that are not social butterflies? Remember, it is the quality more than the quantity of relationships that really matters.

Practicing Kindness

Treating others with kindness is promoted by almost every religion and spiritual philosophy. It isn't just “the right thing to do.” It turns out that it is also a beneficial thing to do, both for the recipient and the giver as well. Being kind or generous raises our own self-esteem, it alleviates guilt and it is also a positive form of self-comparison. When we help others who are less fortunate than us, we often feel better about our own situations. Performing kindnesses may also help a person to develop new talents and make a good impression on others which assists in the development of positive social connections.

How do you practice kindness? You may make charitable donations or you might choose to volunteer weekly or monthly at a local soup kitchen or literacy program. You might simply hold the door for others on a regular basis or greet tired and harried looking coworkers or customers with a friendly smile. Let the driver in a hurry merge in to your lane. Minimal efforts can reap huge rewards. You might actually be surprised at the shocked and appreciative responses you get to the smallest of kindnesses.

Developing Coping Strategies

How we cope with the negative aspects of life has much to say about how much we can appreciate the positive. When we lack coping skills we often let difficult or traumatic events consume us, crowding out any potential for joy or happiness. Learning to cope more effectively may take time, and you may need some help from a counselor, life

coach or a close friend. But as difficult as it may be to learn new coping skills, the willingness to do so can dramatically improve the quality of your life.

People cope with the difficulties of life in many different ways. Some learn to see every life event, good or bad, as a learning opportunity. Others, reach out to social networks and support groups. Others learn problem-solving skills and how to apply them to the challenges they are confronting. Others write or talk with trusted friends to get through the bad times.

Practicing Forgiveness

Why does holding a grudge harm us? There is a saying that does something like this: “Hatred or holding on to anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” That's not it exactly, but you get the point. When we hold on to grudges, ruminate about past hurts and dwell on our own pain, we ruin our own lives...no one else's. Forgiving doesn't mean that we have to like or even associate with the people who have harmed us, but forgiving allows us to leave it behind, to have a sense of closure and to move forward in our own lives unencumbered.

Forgiveness can take many forms from a direct conversation and offer of forgiveness to meditations of forgiveness to journal or letter writing. Anyway you choose to forgive, the act of forgiveness is both a generous gift to another and also a gift to yourself.

Increasing Flow

Flow is something that you experience when you are doing something so pleasurable and so engaging that you lose track of time and often any sense of self in the process. The more often we experience this state of flow, the happier we are. Think about times when you have experienced this, times when you were so absorbed by the task at hand that you forgot to eat lunch or didn't realize that night had fallen. Some people experience this when they are involved in meaningful conversations, some when they are writing, some when they are painting or others when they are running or playing with their kids. Identify what creates flow for you and make more time for it.

Savoring Joys

The opposite of ruminating about life's trials, savoring life's joys helps you to focus on the positive. Thinking about happy or enjoyable events past, present or future, helps to stimulate positive emotions. The more often we experience positive emotions, the happier we will be. See “[The Power of Positive Emotions](#)” for more.

There are many options for savoring life's joys. Try to enjoy the little things even if it means focusing on one small aspect of a larger event. Leaf through old photo albums or slides from happy events or places. Write stories in a journal that recount pleasant memories. Daydream about joy's in the past or upcoming celebrations.

Setting and Working Towards Goals

People who have goals, whether large or small, seem to be happier. Having goals implies that you also believe that you have the power to achieve them which also implies that you have a sense of optimism and high self-esteem. The most important thing to remember about goals is that your goals have to be *your* goals. Choose wisely. You are far more likely to work hard enough to achieve your goals if they are meaningful. For more on this please read "[Focus and Life Goals](#)" and "[How Spirituality Can Help You Reach Your Goals.](#)"

Engaging in Spirituality

Involvement in religion or spirituality has long been touted as one of the keys to a long and happy life. While formalized religion may not be the answer for everyone, spirituality – a willingness and desire to find a larger meaning in life – can help to increase happiness. For those who are so inclined, involvement in church functions, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation and other similar activities can be quite rewarding. For more on this please read "[The Meaning of Spirituality](#)" and "[How Spirituality Can Help You Reach Your Goals.](#)"

Developing Body and Mind

Physical exercise can often lead to improvement in mood and increased health and vigor. The combination allows us to be more confident and more active participants in our own lives. The more positive and healthy we feel, the happier we'll be.

Along with exercising our bodies, we also need to exercise our minds. With consistent practice, meditation can help us to become less judgmental, more focused, more open to new experiences, and more relaxed among other things. Studies not only confirm these benefits, but they are also showing that meditation increases activity in the left prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain that is associated with feelings of happiness. What more proof do you need?

There is a lot of information on the wide variety of meditation techniques available on the web and in your local bookstores for those who are interested. I also have some information posted elsewhere on this site. See "[Passage Meditation.](#)"

So there they are...the top twelve. As you read through them you may have noticed that some of them seem to overlap. You may be familiar with many of them but less so with others. Some strategies may seem appealing and others not so. All of the strategies have evidence that they actually work...but will they work for *you*?

Each of us will find greater benefit from some strategies than from others. The key is to identify those strategies that are best suited to *your* needs, *your* personality, *your* lifestyle. How do you do this? Look back over the strategies and ask yourself the following questions:

Which strategies do I think would come most naturally to me or would I feel most comfortable with?

Which strategies would I find enjoyable or fun?

Which strategies seem to have the most significant potential benefits...which seem most valuable?

These are the ones to try first. At least for now, avoid any strategies that you would only be willing to do out of a sense of guilt or because you might feel obligated or pressured to try.

Still not sure? Need more information of the scientific proof behind these strategies or on which ones provide the best fit for you personally? Check out the book "[The How of Happiness](#)" by Sonja Lyubomirsky. In "[The How of Happiness](#)" which is the source for much of the material in this article, author and researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky details the scientific evidence behind the happiness strategies, offers wise suggestions for their implementation and also provides a wonderful Person-Activity Fit Diagnostic on page 74.

There is a lot of information out there on how to become a happier person and not all of it makes sense. But now that you know what works, it's time to figure out what works *for you*. Give it some thought, choose the strategies that are a good fit and try them out. Let us know what you think.

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