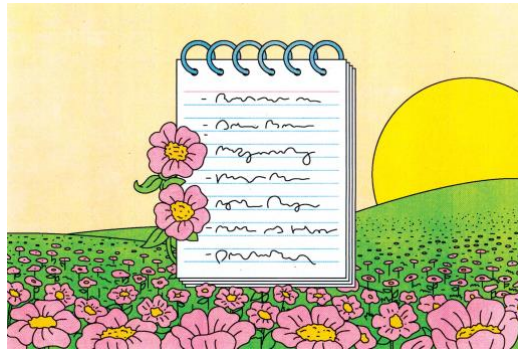


Source C: “7 Simple Ways to Be a Bit Happier Each Day” (Washington Post, July 2025)
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2025/07/22/joy-strategies-health-wellbeing>



7 simple ways to be a bit happier each day

Just a few minutes a day of joy snacking can have a big impact on your life, research shows.

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By Richard Sima

With the stresses of daily life, it can often seem difficult to find moments to smell the proverbial roses.

But you don't necessarily need a lot of time or effort to experience meaningful joy, a recent study reported.

The study, which researchers dubbed the Big Joy Project, enrolled more than 17,000 people across 169 countries to receive one daily joy-boosting activity for a week via email.

Each activity was based on scientific research and — importantly — was accessible and brief, requiring only five to 10 minutes.

Despite the low time commitment — past online intervention studies lasted multiple weeks — the researchers were “surprised” by the effect the program had in sparking joy across the world.

Compared with how they felt before the program, participants said they saw meaningful improvements in emotional well-being, increases in positive emotions and a better sense of control over their own happiness afterward. Participants also said they felt more willing to help others.

The benefits extended to other aspects of health: Participants also reported feeling less stressed and generally healthier, and sleeping better after the week.

“You can make small changes in your life that have big effects,” said Darwin Guevarra, an assistant professor of psychology at Miami University and an author of the study.

The Big Joy Project was meant to show people that “joy is a skill they can build,” Elissa Epel, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of California at San Francisco and a study co-author, said in an email.

Here are seven short, science-based practices you can try — think of them as joy snacks.

1. Seek out awe

Awe is a powerful emotion we feel when we encounter something vast, complex or beyond what we normally experience. It can produce “little earthquakes in the mind,” as one awe researcher put it, that change how we see the world and our place in it. Awe makes us feel more connected and makes us (and our worries) feel small — but in a good way.

Research has linked the emotion to a panoply of psychological and physical benefits — less stress, less rumination and more connection and life satisfaction. In short, it is awesome that our brains can experience awe.

Awe is not hard to find, if you know where to look and the mindset to be in. In the current study, people were told to watch a short, awe-inspiring video of Yosemite and to write what they liked about it and how it made them feel.

Nature is an endless source of awe, but so are inspiring people performing acts of kindness or courage like those profiled by our friends at The Optimist.

With the right mindset, we can find awe in the everyday and transcendence in the mundane.

Just remember to apply the AWE method when you notice something that you had missed:

Attention: Give your full attention to things you appreciate, value or find amazing.

Wait: Slow down, pause.

Exhale + Expand: Amplify the sensations you are experiencing.

2. Tune in to gratitude

Gratitude has been found to improve our mental health, even if we don’t always remember or realize how much a simple gesture of thanks can mean to ourselves and others.

You can start small: In the study, participants were asked to make a list of eight things or people they feel grateful for.

But the more specific and concrete you get, the more benefits you reap.

In a 2022 study of 958 adults, Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor of psychology at the University of California at Riverside, and her colleagues found that writing gratitude letters resulted in larger boosts to well-being than gratitude lists. In addition, writing gratitude letters to specific people in the participants' lives had the greatest benefits.

3. 3. Do something kind

Doing good is good for you.

Studies have found that giving to others also seems to take away our own pain, and spending money on others tends to “buy” more joy than spending it on ourselves. Spreading kindness sets up a virtuous cycle — altruism tends to beget more altruism because doing good feels good, too.

A big reason acts of kindness make people happier is that “these pro-social behaviors are actually social, too, right?” Lyubomirsky said. “It forces you to connect with other people.”

The Big Joy Project asked participants to think of five people they might see that day and one thing they could do for each to brighten up their days. The participants were also encouraged to say or message something kind to someone.

4. 4. Celebrate another's joy

Unlike a food snack, a joy snack multiplies when we share it.

When someone shares something positive with us, we can capitalize on it by expressing excitement and joy for them — a behavior that relationship researchers call capitalization.

Research shows this practice is mutually beneficial.

It's not hard to see why: Capitalization “establishes immediate connection, it has someone listening to you,” Guevarra said. “So it not only boosts your joy, but it boosts another person's joy for sharing something.”

It can be simple yet effective: In the Big Joy Project, participants were asked to find someone to talk to and ask them to share a fun, inspiring or proud moment, and encouraged to respond positively.

In our daily lives, we can practice recognizing when a loved one is sharing something positive and be ready to celebrate with them.

5. 5. Tune in to what matters

Having a sense of meaning is strongly associated with a happier and longer life.

Reflecting on what core values you appreciate can help you make better sense of your life.

“Sometimes we don’t have clarity about what’s important to us. And just taking the moment to think about that is important,” Guevarra said.

In the Big Joy Project, participants were asked to rank four values — virtue, fairness, goodwill and unity — and write about how these values appear in their lives.

6. 6. Reflect on the good you can do

Having a positive impact and feeling as if we matter are common sources of purpose found across cultures and predict having a meaningful or happy life, research shows. In the Big Joy Project, participants listened to an audio-guided reflection on how they can contribute goodness and compassion to the world.

The purpose is “orienting yourself to the world” so you can be a force for good, Guevarra said.

7. 7. Shift your perspective

Negative experiences don’t always lead to negative consequences, research shows. Our beliefs and expectations about difficulties can affect not only how we respond to them, but also how well we feel afterward.

Rethinking these difficulties and finding the silver linings can help you feel better in both the moment and the longer term.

In the Big Joy Project, participants wrote about a recent experience of frustration, upset or anxiety but also three positive things that came as a result.

8. A ‘gateway’ to more joy

The fact that even small joy snacks can be mentally nourishing should not dissuade people from trying longer, heartier practices, researchers said.

The practices in the Big Joy Project can serve as a “gateway” to doing more things, Guevarra said. “It becomes part of your daily routine, it becomes part of your daily life, and it becomes a part of your character,” he said.

Indeed, people who did more of the daily practices had more improvements than those who did only a few.

Interestingly, these joy snacks were even more beneficial for those from less privileged backgrounds. People from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds, or people who had the most financial strain or felt they had the least social status tended to report larger improvements to their well-being after the program.

“Practices focusing on joy are not some luxury we should put off until later, after we have overcome hardships. Rather, they help us get through hard times,” Epel said.

The study did not have a control group — meaning researchers weren’t able to compare similar people who did not get the emails with those who did — and it isn’t possible to know why and how the different micro-joy acts are effective, said Lyubomirsky, who was not involved in the study.

But “they succeeded in increasing joy, and that’s what their goal was,” she said.

9. Finding the best joy snack for you

There are many sources of joy, but you will probably find some joy snacks more appetizing than others.

“Everyone is different and has their preferences,” Epel said. “But there are also some universals.”

The key is to find the right “fit,” said Lyubomirsky, who also writes a newsletter on happiness. That is, how enjoyable, meaningful or natural it is to do something. You may already have some idea of which practice calls to you the most, but it could be worth trying out a different joy snack each day to see what sticks, Guevarra said. “Sometimes a snack is amazing and you really like it and you go back to it and sometimes you’re like, ‘I’m not going to try that thing that I just tried again,’ ” he said. “But I think the attempt is super important ... and I think intentional integration of it in your life is super important.”

And given the stresses we encounter in our lives, we can all spare a few minutes each day for a joy snack or two.

“This is a good time to turn our focus to these practices such as acts of kindness as an essential shield and buffer to the cruelty and suffering filling up the news,” Epel said. “These prosocial micro-acts are happening around us, and to us, every day, and we just need to notice and amplify them out to people we encounter in a typical day.”