



The Science of Feeling Good

Creative Wellbeing Workshops, LLC

Most of us want to be happier. When we ask people what that means in more detail, they usually say that they want more peace, more joy, gratitude, love. They also often say that they want to stop feeling stressed and anxious or that they are tired of feeling angry and fearful.



The Benefits of Negative Emotions

Although negative feelings are often unpleasant, they usually serve a purpose. For example, sadness signals that something important to us was lost; anger that an injustice was perpetrated; fear that we are in danger; guilt that we have done something that we don't feel good about; shame that we did something more egregious that conflicts with our values. When the feeling is very powerful, it can activate the sympathetic nervous system, commonly known as the fight/flight/freeze response.



The Fight/Flight/Freeze Response

The fight/flight/freeze response is useful because it prepares our body to take action. It also narrows our field of vision and eliminates extraneous information so that we can focus on what is most critical to our survival. This reaction is vital if our lives are in danger; however, when we experience the fight/flight/freeze response often and in situations that are not life-threatening, it can lead to anxiety, fatigue, irritability, resentment, illness, interpersonal conflict, and depression.

The Negativity Bias and the Positivity Ratio

In addition, because of the negativity bias—the tendency for negative experiences to trump positive ones—even if we are not dominated by negative feelings, we still need to balance their effect with a higher ratio of positivity. This includes feeling more contentment, peace, joy, curiosity, love, and hope. Positive emotions and experiences have the opposite effect of negative emotions. They broaden our awareness so that we are more receptive and accepting of others; we are more playful, experimental, and willing to take risks; and we perceive things more positively.

The Benefits of Positive Emotions

Not surprisingly, positive emotions are rewarding in and of themselves. In addition, they also improve health and immune function and contribute to more energy and vitality, more successful relationships, reduced stress and anxiety, increased self-confidence, greater resilience, improved performance and enjoyment of work.



Positive feelings that we want to experience more often:

Gratitude: Heartfelt appreciation, feeling blessed, aware of what is good in your life, thankful

Joy: Feeling bright and light, playful, energized, jubilant

Serenity: Low-key joy, feeling that everything is alright, everything will be OK, sitting back and taking it in, peaceful

Hope: Believing that things can change, possibilities exist, faith that things will turn around;



Amusement: Laughter, humor, enjoyment, pleurably entertained

Interest: Noticing possibilities, fascinated, being engaged and in flow, focusing on new challenges, feeling open and alive, curious and receptive

Inspiration: Moved, appreciatively witnessing and being moved by human nature at its best, motivated and engaged

Awe: Goodness on grand scale, struck and even overwhelmed by greatness, feeling like part of something larger than the self, transcendent

Pride: Positive sense of accomplishment, what blooms in the wake of socially valued achievement, urge to share the news, kindles dreams of more achievement

Love: Affection and appreciation, fondness, feeling connected to others, may be momentary or enduring

Forgiveness: Accepting and letting go of the past

Savoring: Enjoying the moment



How to feel more positive emotions:

- Practice gratitude
- Practice kindness
- Think about things that are going well in your life
- Fortify friendships and relationships
- Develop healthy distractions
- Exercise/Rest/Eat well when you can
- Be aware of when you are feeling stressed
- Take extra care of yourself at those times
- Rest
- Play
- Animals
- Music
- Identify and apply strengths
- Do things you enjoy even if they aren't your strengths!
- Take credit for the things you accomplished each day
- Help others
- Seek out nature
- Find meaning
- Cultivate your dreams

Resources

- Positivity. Barbara Fredrickson. www.positivityratio.com
- Authentic Happiness Website <https://www.authentic-happiness.org/>
- Choose the Life You Want: 101 Ways to Create Your Own Road to Happiness. Tal Ben-Shahar.
- The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want. Sonja Lyubomirsky.
- The Upside of Your Down Side. Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener.
- <http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/relaxation-response.html>