

HOW TO... FEEL HAPPIER

We've all got something to be gloomy about these days - the state of the economy, a failing relationship or working in a dead-end job.

Without our realising it, this bombardment of negativity will bring even the most optimistic person down. The good news is that there are things you can do to raise your spirits.

Cognitive hypnotherapist TREVOR SILVESTER has these simple tips to help you feel more positive. Try one or two a day for a fortnight and notice the difference...



Mixed emotions: Marilyn Monroe Struggled with depression

Simple pleasures

Once something becomes familiar, we stop paying attention to it - even if it's pleasurable. Ever had a piece of chocolate that tasted gorgeous, but then you didn't notice the rest of the bar disappearing down your throat?

Start making a note of the simple things that bring you pleasure as you notice them. This way, you heighten the experience and focus on the positive feelings they inspire.

Random kindness

Positive psychologists have found that one of the most effective strategies to lift people from depression is for them to help others.

As social beings, we're hardwired to get a reward of feelgood hormones in return for a positive act towards others. It's easy to forget this in the day-to-day chaos of life, but if you set yourself the goal of performing an act of random kindness for the benefit of a stranger, it will leave you feeling better about yourself for hours.

Count chimneys

It sounds odd, but it's harder to feel unhappy while you're looking up. Obviously, don't do this when there's a danger you could fall down a manhole, but otherwise, give yourself an incentive to look up.

There's a reason for the saying 'you're looking down' when someone seems unhappy. Try it - and things will really look up.

Three gifts

This exercise can have a greater impact on depression than medication, according to research. At the end of each day, just before bed, look back and bring to mind three good things that happened. They don't have to be big things - just hearing bird song or a conversation with a friend.

Then write them down.

This primes your brain to look for the positives in the day, knowing you'll be looking for them in the evening. By tuning towards the positives, it diminishes your attention on the negatives.

Do it today

Procrastination reduces our sense of well-being, while taking action increases our feelings of being in control. The more control we feel we have in our life, the more positive we feel about it. Don't say 'That needs doing', say: 'I'm doing it!'

Share a smile

Happiness reflects back to us. The smile might come from a moment of humour, or it could just be from something shared. Getting people to smile is really easy - but look around you and notice people not doing it. Researchers have found that our expressions cause us to feel the way we look - so smiling increases our happiness whatever our prevailing mood, and sharing our smile makes it even stronger.

Three thank-yous

Find three situations that you can say thank you for. I don't mean just the everyday pleasantries of 'please' and 'thank you', but opportunities to express real gratitude for things that people do for you.

Take a moment, make eye contact if they're present, and thank them. It's called a positive stroke. We like getting them and we like giving them.

Positive consumerism

Much is made of retail therapy, but it's often a short-lived fix. When you're next looking for a present for somebody, buy them something that would give them an experience, rather than just an object. It's even better if it's a shared experience. Presents will wear out, but a memory can last a lifetime.

Give - without expecting to receive

It doesn't matter what you give - your time, your money, your attention - but see how much better you feel when you simply look for opportunities to give to people, without wanting anything back. Whether in your personal or professional life, it can transform the way people see you, and how you feel about yourself. Voluntarily serving others is a proven way of improving your well-being.

Give yourself time

We're often too busy to look after ourselves properly, but most people feel a real boost by focusing on what pleases them.

Set aside 30 minutes, at least once a week, when everyone else comes second (pretend you're a teenager) and you focus on something that brings you pleasure.

Too much pursuit of pleasure soon brings diminishing returns, but get the balance right and it will be a precious part of a happy life.

Trevor Silvester is the founder of The Quest Institute, which specialises in cognitive hypnotherapy and NLP. He also runs a private practice in Harley Street, London. To find out more about the Quest training package, visit www.questinstitute.co.uk