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WAYS TO FEEL GOOD FOR FREE

Beat the financial downturn, cast off the January blues and meet 2009 head on every day for the next month – without spending a single penny

Photographs by Chiara Magni

HOW DO YOU CHEER YOURSELF up? A new haircut? An evening out with your best friend? For most of us, our first instinct is to reach for the credit card, but there are plenty of other ways you can feel better without testing your overdraft. We've selected 31 of the best ways to feel good for free – one for every day of January. Each one provides a chance to step outside of your normal routine and renew your energy and enthusiasm – and if that on its own doesn't make you feel better, then all the money you've saved certainly will.

Let us know how you feel good for free at www.psychologies.co.uk

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*Stop thinking of winter as oppressively dark and turn the long nights to your advantage. 'It seems to be a universal human pastime to look up and wonder at the stars,' says Emily Winterburn, astronomer and author of *The Stargazer's Guide (Constable)*.*

2 'Act as if you were feeling really good,' says cognitive hypnotherapist Katie Abbott. 'Try it now. Pretending to feel a certain emotion can lead to the real thing. How would somebody really confident or really happy act?'

Psychologies readers can win a free session with Abbott. Visit www.katieabbott.co.uk for details.

3 For the next seven days, carry out three random acts of kindness every day. Visit www.randomactsofkindness.org for inspiration.

4 There are two approaches to exercise: easing in gently and going for it. British Military Fitness, an outdoor circuit-training class run in parks nationwide by members of the armed forces, is guaranteed to get the endorphins flowing. Sign up for a free trial class at www.britmilfit.com

5 Log on to www.just-a-minute.org for free one-minute meditations, and join the quest to promote personal peace.

7 Leave the twenty-first century behind. Just for a day, go without your mobile, internet, television and newspaper and try living in the slow lane instead. Now savour the space you've created to just be: curl up with a novel, try a new recipe, play a game or write a letter to an old friend.

6 Create your own laughter prescription. Visit www.sroaudiences.com and sign you and your friends up for free tickets to recordings of television and radio comedy. *The key to promoting laughter isn't just jokes; it's other people.*

8 Make a date with your music collection. 'For people who are sensitive to music, the right piece can have a profound and immediate effect on mood,' says Daniel Levitin, author of the bestselling *This Is Your Brain On Music* (Atlantic Books). ▷



9 Tens of thousands of 'grapplers' meet every year through organisations such as Waterscape (www.waterscape.com) to clear the nation's waterways of shopping trollies, cans and plastic bags. Volunteers can help on short, hands-on projects such as towpath tidies or longer improvement schemes.

10 Create a compliment contagion. Make it your mission today to give at least five compliments, and enjoy how good it feels to make someone else's day. Visit www.complimentday.com for inspiration.

11 Spend half an hour making a gratitude list. Psychologists believe that experiencing gratitude is a core component of wellbeing. Ask yourself who or what you are most grateful for, and why.

Avoid the January sales. There's good fashion prospecting to be had in your friends' wardrobes. Arrange a rumble in their jumble and host a clothes-swapping party. Insist on one good quality item to gain entrance.

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For one weekend, try becoming a tourist in your own town. Most residents rarely visit the tourist attractions on their own doorstep, but you can fall back in love with where you live.

14 Try this memory-boosting exercise. Think of a time when you felt really good, and happy being you. With your eyes closed, remember what you saw around you. Now, think of it as a film. Make the weather even better or the smile on your face wider. Spend five to 10 minutes doing this and enjoy the instant mood uplift.

15 Call one of the friends you're always meaning to catch up with. 'A person's mood goes down when they are too introspective,' says psychotherapist Heber Mattis. 'Talking and listening are not only free, but can benefit your wellbeing enormously.'

16 Plan a night in with your favourite funny DVDs. It's the planning that's important here. Psychologist Lee Berk found that we can raise endorphin levels just by anticipating a good laugh.

17 *Supta Baddha Konasana is a restorative yoga pose said to relieve stress and mild depression. Sit upright with the soles of your feet together and your knees bent. Bring your feet as close to your torso as possible. Lie back with your hands stretched back above your head and a bolster or rolled-up blanket placed beneath your spine for support. Rest here for between five and 20 minutes.*

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Support yourself. 'We talk to ourselves all the time, without even being aware of it,' says Katie Abbott. 'This can create the attitudes and beliefs we have about ourselves. Change your inner voice to one of encouragement and see how much better you feel.'

19 From knitting and crocheting to sock-darning, soap making, millinery and making découpage platters from vintage comics, chances are you have one crafty friend who can share her wares and teach you how. If not, you can find free advice and podcasts on sites such as www.getcrafty.com and www.letsknit2gether.com

21 Become a bodger. Bodging is the art of venturing into your local woodlands (or parklands, wetlands or overgrown cemeteries) and using what you find. Bodging groups give free tutorials on how to turn your waste wood into something special. www.bodgers.org.uk

20 Beg or borrow a copy of Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down The Bones: Freeing The Writer Within* (Shambhala) and develop your creative writing by starting your own book salon. You will be amazed at the diversity, and prompted to write by the structure of sessions.

22 'One of the secrets of a happy life is continuous small treats', said Iris Murdoch. Break up your routine and allow yourself small pleasures – such as a foot massage, a long bath or an illicit duvet day. ▽

