

DOSE of Happiness™

A Prescription to
Positively Shift Your Mindset



The Physiology of Happiness

In difficult times, it's easy to dwell on loss and be emotionally dragged down. However, challenges also provide a unique opportunity for resilience, creativity, innovation, and generosity. What if we purposefully reversed direction and considered the flip side of loss; focusing on our many positive daily outcomes? Despite the challenges, we can increase positivity and joy by borrowing from the science of feel-good hormones—dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins.

Dopamine is released when you are expecting a reward. It creates feelings of alertness and wakefulness. In addition to our mood and happiness, it also affects movement, memory, motivation, and focus, so it is ideal for learning, planning, and productivity.

Oxytocin is known as the hormone that promotes feelings of love, social bonding, and well-being. It is an important chemical messenger that controls some human behaviors and social interaction.

Serotonin is involved in our sense of well-being and plays a major part in regulating our emotions. Increasing it helps brain cells communicate, which has the effect of reducing depression symptoms and improving mood.

Endorphins reduce pain and discomfort so we can continue to function despite injury or stress. They also boost the pleasure we feel from enjoyable activities. And they help reinforce social connections.

Understanding the role of these brain chemicals allows us to make the connection between our actions and our mindset. The levels of these hormones can be boosted when we engage in beneficial activities. By proactively stimulating increased amounts of all four, we can generate a **DOSE of Happiness**.

The Five Categories of Beneficial Activities

Care & Comfort – things we do to support ourselves and others

- self-care: diet, exercise, sleep, mental health, distractions, and physical activities
- comforting others through our good deeds by sharing our time, money, or energy

Social Connections – reaching out to engage with others

- calling family members, friends (new and old), clients, and partners
- staying connected to social circles through online apps and platforms

First-Timers – trying new things and building capabilities

- anything we've always wanted to try that provides a sense of satisfaction
- improvements that will support us during current challenges and for our life in the future

Back Burner – catching up on procrastinated projects

- getting at that dusty to-do list that never seemed to get done
- rediscovering activities of interest that time never before permitted

Deeper Dive – reading, studying, exploring, and practicing

- becoming a subject matter expert where you had already dabbled
- finally having time to learn more about things that have always interested you

My Activity Assessor™

Take a few minutes to consider the impact of challenging times on all aspects of your life. Jot down things in each category that you started doing in response. Perhaps you learned a new skill or partnered with others in novel ways. What activities provided a sense of accomplishment, engagement, or joy?



ex. started daily meditation



ex. hosted a worldwide virtual birthday party for my mother



ex. learned how to bake vegan banana bread and "meatloaf"



ex. organized my photos into albums to share with my family



ex. researched and listened to biographical podcasts on inspirational leaders

Happiness Prescriptives

Reflecting on your past activities just gave you a greater sense of happiness! Here are some additional activities and habits to continue to boost your feel-good hormones.

- eating your favourite foods—including dark chocolate & spicy foods
- food choices and diet (more protein, less saturated fat and sugar)
- supplements
- gut health
- frequent aerobic exercise
- mixing up your fitness routines
- regular high-quality sleep
- listening to instrumental music
- massage (including self-massage)
- acupuncture
- meditation (focus on self or others)
- self-care (ex. soak in the tub, massage)
- lavender and citrus scents
- exposure to sufficient bright sunlight
- helping others, gift-giving, acts of service
- sharing meals and other group activities
- connecting and communicating to build trust
- active seeing and listening—being attentive and not distracted
- actively use social media but include in-person where possible
- touch (e.g. hug someone, pet your dog)
- celebrate ‘wins’—big and small
- be proud of yourself for what you have accomplished
- laughter
- language—use the LOVE word
- body language awareness of self and others
- accept the things you can’t control and question things you feel the need to control



Now consider ways to create your desired “new normal”. How can you better help yourself and others? What connections will you create or deepen? What will you try for the first time? What back burner projects can you tackle? What new knowledge or skills do you want to learn? Is there a habit that you hope to permanently change or adopt? What discoveries will lead you to a new way of being in the future?

ex. Learn more about healthy vegan cooking and commit to a weekly food share with my friend