Get Happy: Four Well-Being Workouts

… kopi fra New York Times, Mobile

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###### **April 5, 2017**

Martin E.P. Seligman, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and a pioneer in the field of positive psychology, does not see alleviating negative emotions as a path to happiness.

“Psychology is generally focused on how to relieve depression, anger and worry,” he said. “Freud and Schopenhauer said the most you can ever hope for in life is not to suffer, not to be miserable, and I think that view is empirically false, morally insidious, and a political and educational dead-end.”

“What makes life worth living,” he said, “is much more than the absence of the negative.”

To Dr. Seligman, the most effective long-term strategy for happiness is to actively cultivate well-being.

In his 2012 book, “Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being,” **he explored how well-being consists not merely of feeling happy (an emotion that can be fleeting) but of experiencing a sense of contentment in the knowledge that your life is flourishing and has meaning beyond your own pleasure.**

To **cultivate the components of well-being**, which include engagement, good relationships, accomplishment and purpose, Dr. Seligman suggests these four exercises based on research at the Penn Positive Psychology [Center](http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/), which he directs, and at other universities.

**Identify Signature Strengths**

Write down a story about a time when you were at your best. It doesn’t need to be a life-changing event but should have a clear beginning, middle and end. Reread it every day for a week, and each time ask yourself: “What personal strengths did I display when I was at my best?” Did you show a lot of creativity? Good judgment? Were you kind to other people? Loyal? Brave? Passionate? Forgiving? Honest?

Writing down your answers “puts you in touch with what you’re good at,” Dr. Seligman explained. The next step is to contemplate how to use these strengths to your advantage, intentionally organizing and structuring your life around them.

In a [study](http://www.psykologtidsskriftet.no/pdf/2005/874-884.pdf) by Dr. Seligman and colleagues published in American Psychologist, participants looked for an opportunity to deploy one of their signature strengths “in a new and different way” every day for one week.

“A week later, a month later, six months later, people had on average lower rates of depression and higher life satisfaction,” Dr. Seligman said. “Possible mechanisms could be more positive emotions. People like you more, relationships go better, life goes better.”

**Find the Good**

Set aside 10 minutes before you go to bed each night to write down three things that went really well that day. Next to each event answer the question, “Why did this good thing happen?”

Instead of focusing on life’s lows, which can increase the likelihood of depression, the exercise “turns your attention to the good things in life, so it changes what you attend to,” Dr. Seligman said. “Consciousness is like your tongue: It swirls around in the mouth looking for a cavity, and when it finds it, you focus on it. Imagine if your tongue went looking for a beautiful, healthy tooth.” Polish it.

**Make a Gratitude Visit**

Think of someone who has been especially kind to you but you have not properly thanked. Write a letter describing what he or she did and how it affected your life, and how you often remember the effort. Then arrange a meeting and read the letter aloud, in person.

“It’s common that when people do the gratitude visit both people weep out of joy,” Dr. Seligman said. Why is the experience so powerful? “It puts you in better touch with other people, with your place in the world.”

**Respond Constructively**

This exercise was inspired by the work of Shelly Gable, a social psychologist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who has extensively studied marriages and other close relationships. The next time someone you care about shares good news, give what Dr. Gable calls an “active constructive response.”

That is, instead of saying something passive like, “Oh, that’s nice” or being dismissive, express genuine excitement. Prolong the discussion by, say, encouraging them to tell others or suggest a celebratory activity.

“Love goes better, commitment increases, and from the literature, even sex gets better after that.”

Det er da værd at gå efter! Så er det forår ☺ Bedste hilsner fra Lotte

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