Savoring and Well-being

Well-being and happiness are said to result from successfully coping with life’s difficulties. They are often associated with development of strengths, capabilities, and paying attention to feelings. Wellness is an ongoing process of making choices that will lead to a healthy lifestyle—not something you do once, but something that you pay attention to and work on. Clearly, one cannot derive enjoyment without noticing it first—without taking a moment to stop and consciously think about the things that bring you pleasure and happiness.

George Carlin once said, “We spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, yet more problems, more medicine, but less wellness.” Our focus and attention is constantly being divided with technology, multitasking, and overwhelming demands on our time.

Emerging research has found that accessing and prolonging positive emotions, or savoring those things that generate thoughts and behaviors that bring pleasure and enjoyment, is an effective way to increase one’s sense of happiness. Yet, in the universal quest for happiness, many wait for it to happen, others hope it happens, and some don’t think about it at all.

What can you do to increase the likelihood of living a happy, healthy, fulfilling life?

Positive psychology is the recently formed branch of research that is dedicated to the study and relevance of human well-being and the factors that contribute to the sense of happiness. These researchers have found that happy people are energetic, creative, productive in the workplace, cooperative, and motivated to help others. In the social realm, happy individuals have more friends, more satisfying social interactions, and a lower likelihood of divorce. Further, happy people have stronger immune systems, cope more effectively with stress, and, most strikingly, even live longer.

Many researchers define happiness as a perceived high level of life satisfaction with frequent positive affects and fewer instances of negative affects. Positive and negative affects are simply experiences of good and bad feelings. Therefore, the conscious focus on a positive situation heightens your awareness and memory of the event, and savoring those feelings and experiences is healthy and provides a subjective sense of well-being and happiness.

Savoring is not a new concept. The word has its origination in the Latin sapere, which means both “taste” and “be wise.” To savor is to taste or smell with pleasure, to observe with relish and delight, to enjoy. The ancients believed that being observant was to be wise, and today the evidence is accumulating in support of savoring positive emotions as a strategy to optimize health and well-being.

Who hasn’t savored the rich aroma of coffee brewing or a pot of soup or stew simmering on the stove? Did you ever lie in the grass and watch the clouds? Rejoice in the rain? Go barefoot in dirt and dunes? For some, it is the exhilarating climb to the top of the mountain, the visual beauty of a coral reef, or a glorious sunset. For others, it is the laughter of children or a quiet moment with a sleeping baby, a spouse, or a beloved grandmother. Few can deny that savoring these activities, thoughts, and feelings provides a physical and psychological boost to your sense of happiness.

Cultivating positive emotions not only counteracts negative emotions, but also broadens individual thinking and builds personal resources for coping. Yet, savoring the moment seems particularly undervalued in our frenzied efforts to meet deadlines and keep up with schedules. Few of us take time to look at the little things in life.

A human being requires balance, self-appreciation, satisfaction in accomplishment, and a sense of well-being to perceive happiness. Savoring pleasurable experiences connects the physical and psycho-
logical affects of positive emotions. Savoring the past, present, or anticipated future is a proven means of cheering up.

**Cultivating Experiences to Savor**

One of the most important ways to savor is sharing positive events with others. Studies have shown that those with strong social networks are happiest; one factor is probably that they are able to savor positive events by sharing, as well as cope with negative events with the support of others.

Showing exuberance, such as clapping, jumping up and down, or expressing awe or pleasure out loud reinforces a positive event. Think about how good it feels to scream and yell for the home team, to proudly observe your child’s graduation, or the splendor and excitement of the fireworks display. Allowing yourself to physically express the event enriches your memory of it.

Another effective savoring method is to practice self congratulations. This is difficult for many because of the cultural norm of humility. One can quietly lavish praise on self in response to a personal achievement, but, it is also important to share with others. When something good happens to you, go ahead and celebrate the event. Tell others what has happened and the significant impact it has had on you and your life. Storing the good feelings of the achievement allows one to return and savor it in the future.

Being grateful is a recognized effective means of enhancing well-being. Studies show that focusing on the positive events of daily life that are often taken for granted and practicing gratitude increases both physical and emotional health.

Savoring strategies can be used successfully by anyone who is willing to actively direct his or her attention to the positive. Take the time to relish and enjoy the moments that touch you the most. Observe what’s working for you. Develop meditation-like techniques and attention-focusing and mind-quieting activities to hone in on what is beautiful and meaningful to you. Almost anything can be savored, as long as one stops to appreciate the pleasure and gratification of the experience.

Too often we are thinking or looking ahead to the next problem or event in our lives, not appreciating the present moment. Every moment is a unique valuable thought, emotion, or memory, tied to each single experience in your life. These moments contribute to the entire picture of your life. When we enjoy every moment, we are building and savoring the happiness in our lives.

Admire the beautiful wonders of nature, listen to your favorite music, pet a kitten or a dog, or soak in a bubble bath. Pleasure can be found in the smallest things. Your savoring moments may be dynamic, absorbing activities, or they are the things that surround you in daily life. The scenic view that you pass on our way to work, the comforting qualities of your family and friends, or the people you see everyday. These moments, be they good health, an engaging career, or supportive social relationships, are gifts to be savored, appreciated, and embraced. By savoring positive emotions we can enhance our current mood and perceptions, creating a connection to our experiences, feelings, relationships, mental capacities, and overall sense of happiness.

**Resources**


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