

- 1. Mark your confusion.**
- 2. Show evidence of a close reading.**
- 3. Write a 1+ page reflection.**

## **(Scientific) Happiness Hacks**

Source: excerpted from an article by Alison Mango in Health.com, January 22, 2016

Some people just ooze happiness: They always seem to be smiling and having fun, and let negative emotions and experiences roll off their backs. But if you think there's no way you could possibly ever be that way, you're wrong. Science proves that you do have the power to change your outlook on life. And it isn't hard, either: Most of the tips that follow are as simple as cracking a smile once in a while (yes, that's one of the tips). Here's to a happier you!

### **Exercise**

Getting your blood pumping releases endorphins throughout your whole body, creating feelings of happiness that combat a bad mood. Studies have even shown that exercise can help alleviate symptoms of depression. Any physical activity counts—running, indoor cycling, yoga, dancing—as long as you break a sweat. Even a brisk 20- to 30-minute walk will help.

### **Flow through some yoga**

When you start to see red, you might want to take a moment and flow through a sun salutation or two. Yoga can help ease depressive symptoms as well as anxiety, allowing you to slow down and focus on your breathing rather than your worries, frustrations, and problems. Try this calming yoga sequence from Kristin McGee, Health's contributing fitness editor.

### **Load up on leafy greens**

Dark, leafy greens such as spinach and kale are rich in folate, providing 33% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA). This nutrient is linked to a decrease in negative moods and depression because it helps produce dopamine in the brain. One 2012 study found that middle-aged people who consumed the most folate had a lower risk of depression symptoms than those who ate the least.

### **Buy flowers for yourself**

A team of Harvard researchers found that keeping fresh flowers at home does wonders in keeping away anxiety and negative moods. People in the study also felt more compassionate toward others and they felt a boost of energy and enthusiasm at work.

### **Smile**

While you may think of smiling as a reaction to feeling happy, some researchers suggest that smiling can also lead to joy. The simple act of smiling—even if you have to force it—might help to activate the happiness centers in your brain, leaving you in a better mood.

### **Turn on a light box**

Light therapy is an effective treatment for seasonal affective disorder (SAD), but experts agree that it works to treat symptoms of major depressive disorder as well. Feeling blue? You can turn on a light box for 30 minutes to an hour when you're down, but to feel its full effects, use it as part of a daily therapy routine.

### **Open the shades**

If you don't have access to a light box, the simple act of letting in some sunlight can brighten your mood. When your workspace or living area is brighter, you tend to feel happier too.

### **Go outside**

Starting to feel down? Head outside to soak up some sunshine. The human body produces vitamin D when exposed to the sun's rays, and research suggests that people who are deficient in the vitamin are more likely to be depressed, anxious, and tired. Step into the sunshine for 20 to 25 minutes of sunlight to lighten your mood naturally.

### **Eat some 'shrooms**

A surprising source of vitamin D? Mushrooms. The tasty vegetable is the only plant source of natural vitamin D, and foods that contain vitamin D boost serotonin in the brain, putting you in a better mood. It's easy to increase your intake of vitamin D this way—throw some mushrooms into your breakfast omelets or lunchtime salads.

### **Smell the oranges**

Citrus scents, such as orange, lemon, and grapefruit bring out positive chemical reactions in your brain as well as work to ease stress. If you want to feel uplifted, use a few drops of citrus essential oil on your pressure points. You can also mix the scent with a floral aroma such as jasmine to increase the positive effects.

### **Eat carbs as an afternoon snack**

You know that afternoon mood slump that hits at just the worst time? Well, it turns out that you can eat your way to a happier, more energized afternoon—carbs. For years we've been hearing that we should avoid carbs, but in reality, a low-carb diet can make us feel sad and stressed. Carbohydrates actually boost mood-boosting chemicals in the brain. But let's get something straight here—we want to focus on healthy, whole-grain sources instead of refined carbohydrates to reap the benefits. When you begin to feel down, go for an afternoon snack of 25 to 30 grams of carbs, such as a three-quarter-cup serving of Cheerios.

### **Play with your pet**

Having a dog or cat can seriously improve your quality of life—their excitement in seeing you come home and their unyielding loyalty make them great companions. There are a host of reasons why pets improve your health, but they can turn around a bad mood and make you happier in no time. A study found that petting a dog for only 15 minutes releases serotonin, prolactin, and oxytocin—all of which are mood-enhancing hormones, while lowering the stress hormone cortisol.

### **Take microbreaks**

Research shows that people who take quick breaks during their workday to watch funny videos online get a high emotional payoff and report feeling more energetic and happy with fewer negative emotions. Not only will this improve your mental health overall; this is an easy way to turn around a bad mood in less than a minute—plus, you can get a metabolism boost, too!

### **Listen to music...**

Have you ever heard a song over the radio that just felt good? Or have you turned on an old CD only to find a flood of happy memories come streaming back? Well, that's due to the fact that music is a mood-booster. It releases the feel-good chemical dopamine into your system and brings on nostalgia.

### **...and sing along**

You can also get happy by making your own music—by singing. University of Manchester researchers discovered that a tiny organ in the inner ear (called the sacculus) is connected to a part of your brain that registers pleasure. The sacculus registers frequency notes that are associated with singing almost instantly, giving you a warm and fuzzy feeling. So go ahead and sing in the shower, belt it out in your car, or get up on that karaoke stage.

### **Eat chocolate (yes!)**

While you might not need another excuse to eat more chocolate, here's another: It makes us happier. Chocolate contains tryptophan, which boosts the production of serotonin in the brain, leading to better moods. This trick also works with other foods containing tryptophan, such as poultry and eggs.

### **Drink coffee**

This morning energy boost doubles as a mood pick-me-up. A Harvard University study found that women who drank at least two cups of coffee regularly were at a 15% lower risk of depression than women who did not. Just keep in mind that those fancy coffee drinks can have tons of hidden sugar and calories, so it's best to stick with black coffee (and some skim milk).

### **Sip on some green tea**

Green tea already boasts an impressive résumé of health benefits. Thanks to the polyphenols it contains, green tea helps with weight loss by boosting metabolism, as well as providing a reduced risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, certain cancers, and osteoporosis. But for your mood? Green tea has been shown to reduce stress levels. A study found that people who drank five or more cups of green tea per day had a 20% lower level of stress than those who drank less than one.

### **Make a human connection**

Put down your smartphone and take a step back from your computer screen. If you want to feel better—and fast—go to a friend or family member for some relief. A study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that human touch releases those feel-good chemicals like serotonin, as well as reduces blood pressure and heart rate making you feel more relaxed.

### **Possible Response Questions:**

- What makes you happy? Explain.
- Pick a passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.