



Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program

Quick Ways to Increase Your Happiness

*“The key to happiness is letting each situation be what it is instead of what you think it should be.”
~Unknown*

No one can be happy all the time. There is a wide range of emotions that the human body creates in response to the world around it, and it is healthy to allow ourselves to experience all of them. In fact, having a diverse emotional “repertoire” is a sign of intelligence. There is evidence, however, that when we experience positive feelings such as happiness, curiosity, interest, joy, bliss, love, and appreciation, our bodies produce chemicals that help improve our health and wellbeing. Below are five simple ways you can increase your happiness:

1. **Mitigate the Negative:** Even when you are going through a stressful situation in your personal life or at school, if you can create positive emotional states while you are in the midst of it, the stress has less of an impact on your health. When you experience humor, gratitude, a sense of freedom or safety, you can essentially mitigate the damage that negative emotional states (anger, irritation, victim mentality, depression, anxiety) can cause. The idea is to balance negative with the positive; if you tend to have negative thoughts or see the world through a pessimistic lens, you can try to mitigate that by incorporating a few positive thoughts or feelings into your daily life.
2. **Be Yourself:** Don’t compare yourself with other people, and don’t succumb to peer pressure. Bronnie Ware, an Australian author who worked with hospice clients, found that dying patients reported one of their top five regrets in life was doing what others expected of them rather than living the life that they wanted to live. Society creates certain norms and mores that we are expected to live by, and often our family, friends, and colleagues reinforce that by expecting us to behave in certain ways. Whether it is in your personal or professional life, finding ways to express yourself creatively rather than succumbing to the pressures of what other people think about you, might just save you from having this regret when it’s our time to go.

3. ***Don't Blame Others for Your Mood:*** What makes perpetually grumpy, unhappy people so miserable? They blame other people or circumstances for how they feel. Remember that no one else can control how you feel. Regardless of the circumstances, or how other people are behaving, you get to choose how you feel because you get to choose your thoughts, and you get to choose what chemicals your brain releases. If you find yourself getting upset with circumstances or other people, take a step back and think about how you want to feel. See your place in the situation, and take responsibility for how you see the world. Every circumstance could be viewed from multiple perspectives. Which perspective do you choose to have?
4. ***Let Go of Mistakes:*** Whether you are worried you will make a mistake or you are mentally punishing yourself for a past mistake, *let it go*. When you spend too much time trying to avoid making a "mistake," you might end up procrastinating, becoming paralyzed with fear, or torturing yourself (and possibly those around you) with a tedious dialogue of options and choices without being able to make a decision. When you beat yourself up over a mistake, you allow the past to prevent you from enjoying the present or from making good choices. In addition, if you indulge in guilt and shame over something that was said or done, you miss learning the lesson that will help you make better decisions in the future. This can be an occupational hazard for law students because you see issues from many different perspectives, and sometimes the consequences to making a mistake can be or seem severe. As such, it is especially important that as a law student you do not wallow in guilt or shame.
5. ***Change Your Theme:*** Whether it is what you say to yourself or to others, your dialogue directly impacts your mood, and your moods directly impact your health. When you complain, feel sorry for yourself, criticize or judge others, or perpetually justify your choices, your mood will not improve. Since the human mind usually repeats the same topics or thoughts on a daily basis, check to see what sort of "theme" you have going from day-to-day. What do you talk to other people about? What words do you choose? What do you think about? Making subtle changes in what you think about, how you perceive what is happening around you, or what you talk to other people about can improve your happiness one word at a time!

Even though these are five *simple* ways to increase your happiness, change in general takes awareness and, sometimes, discipline. Rather than trying to accomplish all five at once, pick

one this week to work on and observe how quickly your mood improves. Then move on to another one on the list, and you will start to experience real change!

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