

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY'S

## 27 MOST FASCINATING FACTS



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# INTRODUCTION

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It is a great pleasure to offer you this compilation of positive psychology facts. During the past fifteen years, Positive Psychology has gained an increasing amount of attention, both from helping professionals and researchers. This attention has resulted in many valuable insights in what contributes to a happy, fulfilling life. In addition, positive psychology has given us many tools not only to flourish, but also to cope with difficult times in life.

We hope that the facts that are presented here may inspire you to increase your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you.

A special thanks goes out to all of the academics and professionals who have contributed to this eBook. Please feel free to print and share this document with others.

All the best!

Seph Fontane Pennock & Hugo Alberts



# ACCEPTANCE

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Fascinating Fact #1:

Research has demonstrated that recognising and allowing, rather than forbidding, one's thoughts to be present reduces their power.

*By Sarah Neil*

## Counteringcravings - all in your head?

**W**ith more people becoming overweight and obese, many are prone to eating unhealthy. Food cravings, which are an intense urge to eat a particular food, have been linked to overweight and obesity. There are many options to help people eat healthier, like point systems and calorie-controlled eating. But, as cravings start in the mind, can the mind be used to stop them?

People often try to tame food cravings through suppression, where one recognises that they are thinking a thought too much and try to stop it. However, the unwanted thought is kept and this strengthens cravings rather than weakening them.

Researchers from Maastricht University taught a group of overweight and obese adults to accept their food cravings. After seven weeks, this group reported lower food cravings, reduced loss of control when near food cues and reduced reinforcing value of food than the group that did not receive this training.

## Reference

Alberts, H. J. E. M., Mulken, S., Smeets, M., & Thewissen, R. (2010), Coping with Food Cravings: Investigating the Potential of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention. *Appetite*, 55, 160-163.

# ADDICTION

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Fascinating Fact #2:

*Positive psychology offers effective techniques which can be used to turn around the lives of teenagers who are suffering from alcoholism.*

*By Jones DurcFahrenheit*

## Turning teen lives around

**I**t has been well researched that teenagers who abuse alcohol suffer detrimental health problems later in life. Because of this, positive psychology has made it its mission to improve teenage well-being. So, how can positive psychology help teenagers who abuse alcohol?

Researchers conducted an experiment where 10 teenagers participated in eight workshops based on the positive psychology models of happiness, strengths, optimism and gratitude. Another group of 10 teenagers did not attend any positive psychology workshops.

It was discovered that the group who did attend the workshops had increased levels of happiness, optimism and positive emotions and much lower levels of alcohol dependence. There were also developments of future goals and large amounts of change which were causing transformation.

## Reference

Akhtar, M., & Boniwell, I. (2010). Applying positive psychology to alcohol-misusing adolescents: A group intervention. *An Interdisciplinary Journal for Working with Groups*, 20, 6-31.

# CREATIVITY

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Fascinating Fact #3:  
*Positivity relaxes the mind and promotes creativity.*  
By Natalie White

## Positivity breeds creativity

**E**ver wondered how a woman like Helen Keller, who was both deaf and blind remained positive throughout her life? Her optimism brought out the creativity within her and she went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree and publish 12 books within her lifetime. Positive affect consists of pleasant emotions, including excitement, joy, happiness, and optimism to name a few.

A positive mood indicates that all is well with the individual which invokes a more carefree and relaxed approach to tasks, allowing the creativity to flow (Filipowicz, 2010). Positive affect activates material that is internally interesting within the memory, and this material is often more widely diverse than other material.

The activated cognitive mind increases the number of ideas which can be related to each other, which can increase the individual's creativity. The way that positivity affects and relaxes the cognitive mind can promote creativity within the individual, and can benefit you in the end as in the case of Helen Keller.

## Reference

Filipowicz, A. (2010). From positive affect to creativity: The surprising role of surprise. *Creativity Research Journal*, 18, 141-145.

# DEPRESSION

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Fascinating Fact #4:

Positive psychology interventions have the power to reduce depressive symptoms.

By Jones DurcFahrenheit

## Alleviating symptoms of depression

**P**ositive psychology, the fostering of positive emotions, positive behaviours and positive thinking; can it improve wellbeing and depressive tendencies? An analysis of 51 positive psychology interventions and 4,266 individuals attempted to answer this question.

The study revealed that positive psychology really does increase wellbeing and sooth depression. Furthermore, the status of depression, the age of the participants and the intervention all had an impact on the effectiveness of the interventions. Because of this, clinicians are strongly encouraged to begin incorporating positive psychology techniques into their work.

## Reference

Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: a practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65, 467-487.

# EXERCISE

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Fascinating Fact #5:  
Physical activity is linked with a variety of positive states,  
including optimism and self-efficacy.  
By Lauren Morgan

## Exercise promotes an optimistic you

**R**ecent studies looking at physical activity have found that highly active individuals are significantly more optimistic than inactive/low active individuals. People who engage in physical activity have been found to have higher self-efficacy, lower anxiety, positive moods and greater happiness.

Not only do people who are physically active live a longer life, they are evidently optimistic about the future and can positively set out goals and aspirations that lead to pure self happiness. Doesn't the thought of being physically and emotionally happy motivate you to get off the couch?

Studies have also shown that those who force themselves to be active during a negative emotional state, consequently reverse the negative cycle and feel more positive and optimistic after engaging in activity. Although motivation is a key factor for engaging in physical activity, once an exercise routine is established, you will strengthen and increase the accessibility of positive resources to maintain a happy and healthy lifestyle.

## Reference

Kavussan, M., McCauley, E. (1995). Exercise and optimism. *Journal of Sports and Exercise Psychology*, 17, 246-258.

# RECOVERY

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Fascinating Fact #6:

*The principles and practice of positive psychology are relevant to brain injury rehabilitation.*

*By Aleksandra Grzywinska*

## Recovery from brain injuries and quality of life

The traditionally happy life encompasses aspects of pleasure, engagement and meaningfulness. After suffering from brain injuries people often find themselves unable to enjoy some or all of these aspects due to inability to continue with hobbies they may have had, engage with people on the same level as they may have previously, loss of sensations such as taste and smell and therefore often fall into depression.

Positive Psychology actually has the ability to foster posttraumatic growth, meaning it can make injury sufferers over-all happier (even more so than they were before).

Positive psychology allows individuals to re-assess what is important in life, live more in the moment, identify what they are grateful for and to develop personal and intra-personal goals for recovery. All this makes individuals with brain injuries more appreciative of all aspects of life and allows them to return to their social and physical lives faster.

## Reference

Evans, J. (2011). Positive Psychology and Brain Injury Rehabilitation. *Brain Impairment*, 12, 117-127.

# FLOW

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Fascinating Fact #7:

*A flow state leads to increased performance. Imagery and confidence appear to be important ingredients.*

*By Rebecca Strange*

## How the flow-state increases performance levels

When we enter a flow state we become absorbed in what we are doing, entering a kind of consistent experience which is seemingly effortless. Examples of this flow can be found in producing music or playing a sport. Psychologists Koehn et al. (2013) conducted research into different performance contexts and the production of the flow state, looking specifically at the way imagery and confidence levels interact to create flow.

Participants completed imagery and confidence measures before undertaking a field test. Measuring the performance of a tennis groundstroke, the researchers found a significant interaction between imagery and confidence. They were able to demonstrate positive associations between imagery, confidence and the inducement of a flow state, which in turn predicts increased performance. In essence, the induction of a flow state is seen to significantly increase performance levels in a given external task.

## Reference

Koehn, S., Morris, T. & Watt, A. P. (2013). Flow state in self-paced and externally-paced performance contexts: An examination of the flow model. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 14, 787-795.

# GENEROSITY

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Fascinating Fact #8:

*Children's generosity seems to be influenced by the generosity of their parents.*

*By Gabriella Bitar*

## Generosity can be transferred

**W**e live in a society where the act of giving and generosity occurs on a daily basis, despite whether the act is large or small. Researchers from Indiana University have found that there is a correlation between the generosity of parents and the generosity of their adult children. It was suspected that each family cultivated and instilled a sense of the joy of giving around the impressionable children. The strength of the intergenerational generosity was then correlated with income and wealth.

From this, it was found that the adult children's giving elasticity was reciprocated in approximately the same magnitude as their parent's giving elasticity. Therefore, it has been found that there is a relationship between parents' secular giving and their adult children's secular giving.

It can be concluded that parents who give generously to secular causes have adult children who have a high probability of reciprocating this generosity compared to parents who do not give generously to secular causes.

## Reference

Wilhelm, M.D, Brown, E., Rooney, P.M & Steinberg, R (2008). The intergenerational transmission of generosity. *Journal of Public Economics*, 92, 2146-2156.

# GRATITUDE

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Fascinating Fact #9:

Women are more likely to feel and express gratitude, make less critical evaluations of gratitude, and derive more benefits.

By Katherine Watson

## Are women better at expressing their gratitude?

It is culturally accepted that women are the more nurturing, emotionally savvy sex but are they also more grateful? Curious researchers set out to see if the previous work, suggesting it was true, was in fact so.

Three individual studies were conducted testing different aspects of gratitude and the differences between the sexes in each. Study 1 showed that when evaluating gratitude women found it more interesting and exciting and less conflicting. In study 2 when describing the last time they were given a gift women reported less burden/obligation and greater gratitude than men. Study 3 followed men and women over 3 months women who tested highly on a gratitude test were more likely to feel autonomous and connected. Men however derived fewer benefits from gratitude and were more critical of gratitude in general.

Perhaps it is not a question of who is better at gratitude but who benefits more from being grateful. And according to this study women are the clear beneficiaries.

## Reference

Kashdan, T.B., Mishra, A., Breen, W.E. & Froh, J.J. (2009). Gender differences in gratitude: examining appraisals, narratives, willingness to express emotions and changes in psychological needs. *Journal of Personality*, 77,3, 691-730.

# HAPPINESS

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Fascinating Fact #10:  
Happiness can be found even under conditions of extreme poverty.  
*By Melissa Jackson*

## Did you know that happiness can be found in the garbage?

**H**appiness has long been believed to be related to material possessions and standards of living, both of which are dictated by our levels of income. New research however reveals that happiness may decrease as income increases, and only spending on leisure activities is related to our level of wellbeing. Family and friends, health and wellbeing, and the quality of our work have been found to provide greater levels of happiness.

In Leon, Nicaragua, most of the city's inhabitants live below the poverty line. This has forced some residents to live in the rubbish dump, collecting and recycling rubbish for a living. Although these collectors are the poorest of the poor and socially scorned, interviews reveal that over 70% are happy and optimistic about a better future. Over 80% have strong social relationships and those that are happiest listen to the radio, read and partake in sport. Although some have access to electricity, television and mobile phones, these do not increase their levels of happiness. Overall, happiness appears to be based on the satisfaction these people find in different areas of their lives and is proof that money does not buy happiness!

## Reference

Vazquez, J. (2012). Happiness among the garbage: Differences in overall happiness among trash pickers in Leon (Nicaragua). *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8, 1- 11.

# HEALTH

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Fascinating Fact #11:

Writing about personal experiences can positively influence both mental and physical health.

By Lauren Morgan

## A narrative a day keeps the doctor away

**W**riting about personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes a day over the course of three days can in fact improve mental and physical wellbeing. This incredible finding has been replicated across a range of ages, genders, cultures, social class and personality types. It was discovered that those who benefit the greatest from writing tend to use a high number of positive-emotion words, a moderate amount of negative-emotion words, and increase their use of cognitive words over the days of writing.

These findings suggest that personal narrative formation is a critical strategy for improving ones mental and physical health as well as giving each person the chance to reflect on their personal behaviour, emotions and attitude on a daily basis. Ongoing studies have also further discovered that writing serves a function of organising of complex emotional experiences, further promoting a sense of connectedness with one's self.

## Reference

Pennebaker, J., Seagal, J. (1999) Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55, 1243-1254.

# HUMILITY

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Fascinating Fact #12:  
Humility is positively linked with helping behaviour.  
By Courtney Whittaker

## It helps to be humble

**M**any factors can influence whether one decides to help or not. For example, certain aspects of personality have been found to impact on one's helping behaviour. But does one's level of humility have any influence?

Researchers at the University of Maine did three studies investigating the effect of humility on helpfulness. In the first study, it was found that participants who rated themselves as more humble, also rated themselves as more helpful. In a second and third study, participants were given the opportunity to help someone and those that were more humble, helped more.

Humble participants also spent more time helping their fellow students. This result was found even when previously found predictors of helping behaviour such as empathy were accounted for. These studies show that humble people are more likely to help, and when they do, they will help you for longer than those who are less humble.

## Reference

LaBouff, J. P., Rowatt, W. C., Johnson, M. K., Tsang, J., & Willerton, G. M. (2012). Humble persons are more helpful than less humble persons: Evidence from three studies. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 7, 16-29.

# STRENGTHS

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Fascinating Fact #13:

Mindfulness can be a valuable tool to uncover your personal strengths.

By David J Patrick

## Humans are wired to cooperate

**L**atest research in mindfulness is exploring the overlap with personal character strengths. There are a set of 24 strengths identified and each vary in capacity from person to person. Basically, this means that you already have what you need to set yourself on a journey of flourishing in your life.

By identification of your personal character strengths and practise in mindfulness training you can develop your wellbeing from within regardless of the external factors of your life. The focus is within and the more you are able to attune to yourself, the more self-aware you will be and to better utilize your strengths in life. This could mean developing your sense of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and even transcendence.

## Reference

Niemiec, R. M., Rashid, T., & Spinella, M. (2012, July). Strong mindfulness: integrating mindfulness and character strengths. *Journal of Mental Health Counselling*, 34, 240-253.

# MEDITATION

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Fascinating Fact #14:

Mindfulness meditation can help to decrease the experience of pain.

By Zoe Overton

## Practicing mindfulness meditation decreases sensitivity to pain

**M**indfulness is a concept derived from Buddha's teachings. It allows people to be present in the moment and react less to things such as emotional and circumstantial experiences, regardless of if they are positive or negative. Human beings are susceptible to pain, however, the question is if this pain can be decreased by simple meditation?

At North Carolina University in the United States, experiments were conducted using electrical stimulation on participants. The participants were sent brief electrical pulses which increased and decreased in strength depending on each person's pain tolerance.

Once each participant's ratings on pain were recorded, the participant then practiced mindfulness meditation for 20 minutes each day over a period of three days. Once the three days were complete each participant's ratings on pain were measured again using the same method. The experiment's results showed that participant's ratings on pain had significantly decreased since the commencement of the three day meditation. The participants were less susceptible to pain!

### Reference

Zeidan, F., Gordon, N. S., Merchant, J., & Goolkasian, P. (2010). The effects of brief mindfulness meditation training on experimentally induced pain. *The journal of pain, 11*, 199-209.

# MINDFULNESS

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Fascinating Fact #15:

Mindfulness training leads to attentional improvements, particularly in relation to quality of information and decisional processes, which are directly linked to working memory.

*By Ravi Thandi*

## Being mindful can improve your working memory

**M**indfulness refers to the act of being attentive to the present moment, not the past or the future. It involves a certain level of awareness and a non-judgmental acceptance of the moment as it is. Working memory is the memory system that temporarily stores information in our minds for further recall and future processing. Many studies have been undertaken that suggest a strong interrelationship between attention and working memory.

VanVugt and Jha (2011) undertook research that involved taking a group of participants to an intensive month-long mindfulness retreat. These participants were compared with a control group who received no mindfulness training (MT). All participants from both groups first undertook a memory recognition task before any MT had been providing. A second round of a memory recognition task was then undertaken by all participants after the month's training.

While accuracy levels were comparable across both groups, reaction times were much faster for the group that had received mindfulness training.

## Reference

vanVugt, M.K. & Jha, A.P. (2011). Investigating the impact of mindfulness meditation training on working memory: A mathematical modeling approach. *Cognitive Affective Behavioural Neuroscience*, 11, 344-353.

# GOAL SETTING

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Fascinating Fact #16:

The type of goals people set influence the happiness that results from achieving them.

By Enya Venn

## The dark and bright side of goal setting

**W**e have all been told that goal setting is a valuable and rewarding tool; it will motivate us to do the things we need to do, provide us with results, and thus ultimately make us happy and successful. In fact, positive psychology researchers have found that subjective well-being is highly influenced by goal setting.

However, it is not as simple as it sounds. Non-zero sum goals such as fostering positive relationships with family and friends, political involvement or altruism can increase life satisfaction for both males and females. On the other hand, zero-sum goals such as having a successful career, money or material goods are generally harmful to life satisfaction, especially for women. Furthermore, those who perceive that events are personally controllable (an internal locus of control) are more satisfied with life than those who view events as out of their own control (an external locus of control). What this means for you is that when goal setting, choose goals which are less about competition and more internally motivating over ones which are competitive and externally motivated!

## Reference

Headey, B, (2008). Life Goals Matter to Happiness: A Revision of Set Point Theory. *Social Indicators Research*, 86, 213-231.

# NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

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Fascinating Fact #17:  
Exposure to nature helps to restore our resources.  
*By Ashley Williams*

## Nature: The free therapy for life

**H**ave you ever noticed whilst gazing into the oceans waves or walking through an open field in the countryside that you suddenly felt extremely relaxed and at peace? For years we have been told that nature is good for us, but now there is scientific evidence to confirm this theory and help explain why.

Apparently, interacting with a natural environment (compared to a built up environment such as a city) allows our attention mechanisms a chance to replenish and restore themselves. This can lead to increased attention and a higher ability to reflect on our life problems. Not only that, exposure to nature has been shown to decrease negative behaviors such as aggression, anxiety and depression, and at the same time increase positive emotions and health.

Considering nature has absolutely no bad side effects, is readily available and doesn't cost a thing, it would make sense to make it our therapy of choice.

## References

Mayer, F. S., Frantz, C. M., Bruelman-Senecal, E. & Dolliver, K. (2009). Why is nature beneficial? The role of connectedness to nature. *Environment & Behaviour*, 41, 607-643.

Berman, M. G., Jonides, J. & Kaplan, S. (2008). The cognitive benefits of interacting with nature. *Psychological Science*, 9, 1207-1212.

# SELF-COMPASSION

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Fascinating Fact #18:

Higher levels of self-compassion are associated with less divorce related emotional stress.

*By Matilda Harper*

## Self-compassion can help you get over a divorce quicker

**I**n a study conducted by researchers at the University of Carolina, it was found that higher ratings of self-compassion were linked to quicker emotional recovery.

In the study participants currently involved in divorce proceedings were asked to picture their ex for thirty seconds. They were then asked to talk about their thoughts and feelings for four minutes. Four undergraduate researchers who were blind to the experiment, analysed these recordings and rated the participants on the Self-compassion scale-short form. A follow-up was conducted three months and again at six months after the study.

It was found that higher levels of self-compassion were associated with less divorce related emotional stress. This was true at both the start of the study and through to the six month mark. The findings suggest that self-compassion is an important component in recovering from the traumatic experience of divorce. In other words, loving yourself can help you deal with the good times and the bad!

## Reference

Sbarra, A. D., Smith, L. H., & Mehl, R. M. (2012). When Leaving Your Ex, Love Yourself: Observational Ratings of Self-Compassion Predict the Course of Emotional Recovery Following Marital Separation. *Psychological Science*, 23, 261-269.

# COPING

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Fascinating Fact #19:

Writing and talking about difficult life events seems to be a more effective coping strategy than thinking about the events.

*By Sarah Neil*

## Sometimes writing and talking is better than thinking

Everyone experiences hardships in life and deals with them differently. Journalling, venting to significant others or thinking to oneself are common ways of coping with such events. But which ways are the best?

Researchers from University of California divided students into three groups to process negative life events differently: thinking, writing or talking. Each group processed the negative life events for fifteen minutes on three consecutive days. Students who thought about a negative life event reported worse mental health and satisfaction with life than those who wrote or talked about them.

Writing and talking organise negative life events through words, so that one can gain a sense of resolution and thus can better manage their emotions. Thinking is relatively disorganised because it contains words, images, emotions and memories and this can lead to thoughts repeating until they are organised. The researchers speculate that writing and talking allow one to release the pain of negative life experiences, whereas thinking internalises coping, enabling the pain to be relived and maintained.

## Reference

Lyubomirsky, S., Sousa, L., & Dickerhoof, R. (2006). The Costs and Benefits of Writing, Talking and Thinking About Triumphs and Defeats. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 692-708.

# POSITIVE EMOTIONS

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Fascinating Fact #20:

Positive emotions, positive social connections, and physical health influence one another in a self-sustaining upward-spiral dynamic.

*By Caitlin Smith*

## Your positive emotions can boost your physical health

**N**ew studies show that being a more happy and optimistic person can have great benefits not only mental health but also physical health. Researchers at the University of North Carolina have found that social connections have a major contribution to the relationship between positivity and health.

They conducted a study where half of the 65 participants completed a loving-kindness meditation course, which involved meditating at home and learning how to foster positive feelings. They were told to report their emotional experiences and social interaction throughout the course. The other half of the participant's were told that they were on a waiting list for meditation.

The researchers measured the vagal tone, which plays a role in heart rate regulation as well as social engagement before and after the course and found that those who participated in the meditation course had increases in positive emotion, which linked to more social connections. In contrast, those who didn't participate had no increases.

## Reference

Kok, B.E., & Coffey, K.A., & Cohn, M.A., & Catalino, L.I., & Vacharkulksemsuk, T., & Algoe, S.B., Brantley, M., & Fredrickson, B.L. (2013). How positive emotions build physical health: perceived positive social connections account for the upward spiral between positive emotions and vagal tone. *Psychological Science*, 7, 1123- 32.

# RESILIENCE

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Fascinating Fact #21:

Positive social interaction can counteract low resilience due in children who struggle with antisocial behavior.

By Eileen Martin

## You can foster resilience in a child

Providing a positive interaction for a child who may otherwise be overlooked due to behavioral issues may improve his/her chances of being resilient in the long term.

Jaffee, Caspit, Moffitt, Polo-Tomas & Taylor (2007) found that children who struggle with antisocial behavior such as aggression and poor social skills are often disregarded not only by their peers, but likewise by influential adults in their life. This study revealed the importance of providing children with positive social interactions which may enable them to call upon their strengths and become more resilient to adversity.

Another study confirms these findings; community resources and positive role models have been found to be influential in determining resilience in children. At risk children exposed to nurturing adults outside their familial environment have a better chance at coping with difficult circumstances they may encounter in life.

## References

Jaffee, S. R., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T. E., Polo-Tomas, M., & Taylor, A. (2007). Individual, family, and neighborhood factors distinguish resilient from non-resilient maltreated children: A cumulative stressors model. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 231-253.

Mandleco, B. L. & Peery, C. J. (2000) An organization framework for conceptualizing resilience in children. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 13, 99-111.

# SELF-CONTROL

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Fascinating Fact #22:  
Positive moods promote self-regulated behaviour.  
By Ashley Hodgkin

## Happy moods are good news for our self-control

**D**o you ever find that when you are in a bad mood, going to the beach seems like a better option than staying home to study for an exam? The type of mood we are in can determine the choices we make when it comes to indulgent behaviours like gambling, over-eating and procrastinating.

It has been found that when you are in a happy mood you are more likely to practice for an upcoming test compared to when you are in a bad mood. It is thought this is because when we are feeling negative we put fixing our mood ahead of using self-control. So rather than studying for a test, grumpy people will procrastinate and spend their time making themselves feel happier instead.

If you are trying to stick to a diet, or get an A on an assignment, instead of eating more pie or going to the beach, think positive thoughts and you might find the inner strength you need to maintain your self-control.

## Reference

Tice, D. M., & Bratslavsky, E. (2000). Giving in to feel good: The place of emotion regulation in the context of general self-control. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 149-159.

# GOAL SETTING

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Fascinating Fact #23:

Striving for the right reasons produces an upward spiral of positive outcomes.

By Ravi Thandi

## What goes up mustn't always come down

**A**nd the formula is surprisingly simple... Psychologists undertaking research at North American universities believe that setting self-concordant goals – truly intrinsic goals for which one feels ownership and identifies with – is the key towards embarking on a road of ever-increasing goal attainment. The explanation? Attainment of intrinsic goals leads to increased well-being as well as increased levels of motivation for attaining future goals. It's a positive spiral of achievement.

Researchers expanded on previous studies of self-concordant goal attainment by undergoing two studies, varying in nature, but both of which required participants to generate and record a set number of goals, as well as rate whether the goals were externally or internally driven. They later reported whether they had attained those goals.

Results from both studies indicated that happiness is best pursued through long-term and incremental goal-setting and attainment. In particular, it was setting and attaining intrinsic, self-concordant goals that tended to lead to the most positive results in terms of well-being.

## Reference

Kennon, S.M., & Houser-Marko, L. (2001). Self-concordance, goal attainment, and the pursuit of happiness: Can there be an upward spiral? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 152-165.

# SMILING AND LAUGHTER

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Fascinating Fact #24:

Smiling can be an effective way to recover from stress.

By Aaron Wiseman

## Smile, for it might actually make you happier

**W**hile it might seem unlikely, psychologists at the University of Kansas have found that smiling may actually make someone happier. Although it might seem intuitive that smiles are a result, not a cause, of feeling happy, the researchers found that forcing a smile can lead to less stress.

In the study, published in the journal *Psychological Science*, 170 participants were asked to place two chopsticks between their teeth. The chopsticks were placed in a manner that either activated the facial muscles to produce a smile, or neutral expression. While the chopsticks were in position, the participants were asked to perform two difficult, stressful tasks. By measuring their heart rates, the researchers found that the participants producing smiles recovered from the stressful tasks quicker.

This demonstrates the potential positive effects of smiling, even if it is unnatural, in a stressful situations. So next time you are in a stressful situation, such as getting an injection, forcing a smile may just make it more bearable, leaving you happier.

## Reference

Kraft, T. L., & Pressman, S. D. (2012). Grin and bear it: The influence of manipulated facial expression on the stress response. *Psychological Science*, 23, 1372-1378.

# MUSIC

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Fascinating Fact #25:

Listening to music can help to decrease stress and anxiety.

*By Sarah Foster*

## Feeling stressed? Tune in...

**N**ot only can listening to music reduce stress levels, but it also can contribute to increased well-being in stressful and painful environments.

Music engagement has shown to be more effective than progressive muscle relaxation in relieving stress. A study was conducted that subjected patients being treated for coronary heart disease to music on a regular basis. The results reflected that patients who listened to music on a regular basis had decreased levels of stress and anxiety. In conjunction with this, patients felt an increase relaxation and positive emotions after being subjected to the music.

Music acts as a distractor, focusing patient's attention away from negative stimuli to something more pleasant an encouraging. Music intervention can be a tool to influence positive emotions and reduce stress by creating an environment that stimulates and maintains relaxation, well-being and comfort. The reduction of stress and anxiety creates a more positive environment, and emphasis and focus is shifted on happiness and pleasure, influencing well-being and positivity.

## Reference

Matzo, M. (2009). Music and Stress Reduction. *American Journal of Nursing*, 109, 40.

# OPTIMISM

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Fascinating Fact #26:  
Optimism is related to physical health.  
*By Ruby Cooper*

## Optimistic thinking is beneficial for physical health

**R**esearch has found that optimism can be a predictor for good physical health and long life. In the elderly, it has been found that optimism predicts better levels of health, lower levels of reported pain, and better recovery from illnesses. In addition, research has shown optimism to be predictive of better recovery from surgery, lower rates of stroke, and fewer lasting effects following a fall.

In the general population, optimism has been related to better immune functioning and quicker wound healing. Optimists have also been found to generally take better care of their personal health, and to have more social interactions and support, both of which have health benefits.

While there is more to learn about the relationship between optimism and health, the two are undeniably linked. From this, it would appear that a healthy dose of optimism can not only improve cognitive quality of life, but also health and longevity. Not only is optimism good for the mind, but it is also good for the body!

## Reference

Reference: Kim, E. S., Park, N. & Peterson, C. (2012). Can optimism decrease the risk of illness and disease among the elderly? *Aging Health*, 8, 5-8.

# VALUES

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Fascinating Fact #27:  
Optimism is related to physical health.  
*By Leisa Doherty*

## What is a life worth living?

According to positive psychology, one of the ways in which we can make ourselves feel good and induce positive emotions is to live a life that is in alignment with our core values. We all have core values that define the essence of who we are. Some people base theirs on the importance of family and friends and living a healthy lifestyle. Other important values may be respect, integrity and a good work ethic.

Once we define our core values, we can ask ourselves how well does my life align with these values? The point is that in order to live an authentic life, our core values should drive all our decisions and actions. When our choices are in alignment with these values, we are living an authentic life and feel good about ourselves.

## Reference

Steger, F., Sheline, K., Merrieman, L., & Kashdan, T., (2013). Using the science of meaning to invigorate values-congruent, purpose-driven action. In J. Ciarrochi & T. Kashdan (Eds), *Mindfulness, Acceptance, and Positive Psychology: The seven foundations of well-being* (pp. 240-266). New Harbinger Publications: Oakland, CA.

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