

Wellbeing and Happiness

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Feature Article: Just a Matter of Luck

How often have you said to a person that they were lucky? Or you lament your own bad luck when something bad happens. When we talk of luck, it's with the idea that it is something beyond our control. Perhaps the world has it in for us, or we were just born unlucky. Those lucky folks out there have it easy – success comes their way and only good things ever happen to them. To talk of luck is to undermine the actions and thoughts of people.

I once lost my mobile phone. A few days later I picked it up from a bus depot. Was I lucky? People said I was. Yet really it was a sequence of events that led to the phone's retrieval. I spent a day searching my house, emptying bins, badgering friends and I phoned the bus depot. I could have accepted the fate of my lost phone (lamenting my bad luck), but I persisted. Let's not forget the actions of the driver who found my phone on the bus and the helpful person at the bus depot.

So if luck is not some magical force, then what is it? It is about taking action, recognising the control you have over your own life and making things happen. In fact, lucky people have simi-

lar characteristics to optimistic people. They expect good things to happen and the bad stuff to be short-lived. If you recognise that you are responsible for your choices and don't wait for 'luck' to happen, you will get lucky.

Research by Wiseman found that so-called lucky people are lucky because of what they do. They will take advantage of opportunities that come up, act on a hunch, expect good things to happen and turn bad luck into positive opportunities. In one of his experiments a self-defined 'lucky' man spotted and picked up a five pound note on the floor and struck up conversation with a successful business man. The 'unlucky women', stepped over the five pound note and sat alone, not speaking to the business man.

How to create your own luck

* If you see an opportunity that tempts you, take it. Recognise that if you fail to take it and later regret it, you weren't unlucky, you just failed to act.

* Know that good and bad things happen to all of us. It's what you do next that matters.

* Have the courage to ask



Fingers crossed someone will read this article

for what you want. If you don't ask, you may not get it. Relying on others is not the way forward.

* Keep a look out. Try new things and be more curious.

* If you have a gut feeling about something, follow it. Trust yourself to make the right decision.

* Expect to be lucky every day. Define yourself as 'lucky' and look for opportunities that reinforces this new label you have attached to yourself.

* Persist at what you start. Persistence equals achievements and to the world you are deemed lucky.

* Recognise that what happened in your past happened in your past. It does not make you unlucky today or tomorrow.

Inside this issue:

Feature Article: Just a Matter of Luck	1
In the news: latest wellbeing news and research	2
Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy	3
Make the Change's counselling services	3
Happiness tips and research	4
Happiness Article: The Positive Psychology of Gratitude	5
Happy Mails	5
About Make the Change	6
New to Make the Change	6
Unsubscribe	6

In the news

A round up of some of the latest research and news relevant to your wellbeing.

Thinking of others

Who makes you feel good about yourself? When you think about them you feel better, more positive and of the belief that you can do anything. Now the next time you want to feel better about yourself, think about this person. Research by Schlenker and colleagues found that visualising a parent had a negative effect on participants' ratings of self when they carried out a personality test compared to those who visualised a friend or partner.

Ikigai

Ikigai is a Japanese term which means having a sense of joy and wellbeing. Researchers at Tohoku University in Japan have found having a lack of ikigai to be associated with an increased risk of early death, particularly through cardiovascular disease or suicide. Over 43,000 men and women took part in the study and were followed for seven years. Those missing ikigai were 50% more likely to die compared to their happier counterparts.



Write down your feelings

Put your relationship into words

Research at the University of Texas indicates that writing about your relationship will enhance its chances of lasting. 86 undergraduates spent 20 minutes a day for three days writing down their deepest thoughts and feelings with regards to their romantic relationship. Three months on, 77% of these people were still in the same relationship, compared to just 52% of people who had just written about their daily activities. It seemed the writing exercise had improved the person's communication with their partner.

Read fiction

If you're not sure what to read, go for fiction if you want to be more empathetic. The more novels a person reads the greater their levels of empathy and social awareness. This was the finding of research conducted by Mar and colleagues. Of course it may be that people with greater empathy were naturally attracted to reading novels.

"the writing exercise had improved the person's communication with their partner"

Sleep deep, learn more

You really need a good night's sleep to consolidate all that you have learned the day before. Now research has shown it can also affect how well you learn the next day. 13 participants in a study conducted at McGill University in Canada were deprived of deep sleep for a night. The participants were able to learn fewer images after a night without deep sleep compared to those who had a normal night's sleep.



Relieve stress

Chew gum

According to researchers at Swinburne University, chewing gum can reduce stress and anxiety before an upcoming event. It can even make you more alert. 40 participants were given stress-inducing tests, which brought about anxiety. Their stress levels were also measured. Those who chewed gum experienced 17% less stress when exposed to mild stress situations and were 19% more alert than those who did not chew gum. For moderate stress, the group experienced 10% less stress and were 8% more alert.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) emerged in the 1950s when psychologists became interested in whether thought processes were learned in the same way as behaviour is. It stemmed from behaviour therapy which focused only on behaviour. The common precept behind CBT is that the way we think has a major influence on our subsequent emotions and behaviours. It is possible however to change the way with think and as such bring about emotional and behavioural change. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is just one type of cognitive behaviour therapy.

REBT was pioneered by Albert Ellis who personally used the techniques he taught his clients during his own long life (he died in 2007 aged 93). Essentially, people display both rational and irrational thoughts. Too many irrational thoughts can impact on life, causing unhappiness, anxiety, depression and so on. REBT aims to teach clients the difference between rational and irrational thinking. Irrational thinking is thinking that essentially makes little logical sense,

or fails to stand up to the evidence. 'Bad things *always* happen to me', 'I *must* not fail' are examples of irrational thinking.

Although irrational thoughts may have evolved over years and stem from childhood, REBT does not focus on the past. Rather it works with what is going on for the client right now and aims to help people accept themselves and others as they are, including their imperfections.

REBT therapists follow an ABC approach. A refers to the activating event that causes concern for a person (eg. standing on a ladder). B is the belief held by the person about A (I am going to fall to my death). C is the consequence of that belief (anxiety, shaking, avoiding ladders). The important point is that it is a person's belief that led to the consequence, not the event itself. Another person may have no problems standing on a ladder, as they know they are safe.

Having understood the link between beliefs and the subsequent consequences, the therapist works

to help the client recognise that their beliefs are irrational and should be challenged. This is known as disputing. The client may undergo many types of activities to recognise that their thinking is illogical. The person fearing the ladder comes to recognise the belief that they will die is an irrational one.

Finally the client learns to replace their old, irrational beliefs with more realistic ones that enable more appropriate behaviours. As such they have changed the consequence. 'I can be safe on the ladder, I just have to be careful.' allows the person to use a ladder without fear. The client would engage in behaviours that reinforce their new beliefs.

Once the technique is learned, the client is able to use it in their life ever onwards. They recognise the impact thoughts have on their subsequent feelings and behaviours.



I must stop worrying about worrying

Counselling Services

Make the Change is pleased to offer you a number of counselling services, all available online. Live, 50 minute sessions are available. Here you have a choice of three formats: text, voice or video. You can browse the diary to choose a session that suits you. There is no need to contact your counsellor to find out what times are available. The



whole process can be done online, by logging on to the website.

A further service available is the Problem Page. This enables users to submit a problem and receive a personalised response back.

To find out more visit:

<http://www.makethechange.com.au/community/counselling>

You can access this service at any time and no appointment is necessary. The Problem Page is a secure alternative to email counselling.

All services are secure and SSL is used to protect the security of the information passing between the server and your browser.

Happy Times

Happiness tips and research

Have a banana

What you eat can have an impact on how happy you feel. If you want to increase your mood, go for foods that contain tryptophan, since they raise your serotonin levels. With increased serotonin, people feel more resilient, comfortable, safer and happier. Bananas do just that, as well as nuts and oats.

Keep it personal

As you read all the tips, ideas and research findings that promote ways to increase your happiness, try to think how it will work for you personally. Circumstances can be a factor, but also consider your personality, strengths and goals in deciding ways you are going to increase your happiness. Adapt what you read about happiness to suit you.

Mix things up

A variety of activities are the key to happiness. So as you continue on your happiness journey, bear in mind that doing the same thing over and over means it may become stale. Try to monitor how you feel about a particular activity to check it is still adding to rather than taking away from your happiness.

Get excited

When you next make plans, commit yourself to the task with energy and determination. Whether it is planning something to do at the weekend, your next holiday or an evening out, really get involved and be enthusiastic. Don't assume things will go wrong and if you can, involve people who will match or even surpass your energy.

Share your learning

Try sharing with others the knowledge you have acquired about what makes a happier life. Hopefully the recipient will learn something which inspires them to make positive changes in their life. Sharing this happiness stuff may also help keep you on the track of your own happiness path and keep you inspired and uplifted.



Happy food

Small ways to happiness

To increase your happiness long term, try to implement as many small, positive activities into your life as possible. Research by Mochon and colleagues found people who attended exercise classes on a regular basis as well as those who attended religious services were happier after the event than they were before. Also, the more they did it, the greater the gains.

Friends

Having 10 or more good friends has been related to greater happiness levels. Research by Tunney at the University of Nottingham in the UK found people extremely satisfied with life had twice as many friends as those people who were extremely dissatisfied. Women had fewer friends than men, but were closer to the ones they had.

Find everyday happiness

No one major life event will bring lasting happiness. After a period of time your happiness levels return to normal. Findings from a 20 year study published in the Economic Journal support this idea. Positive events do cause an initial increase, but after a time, you adjust and return to your baseline level. The good news is, the same happened with negative events (apart from unemployment).

Happiness Article: The Positive Psychology of Gratitude

Gratitude is about having an awareness of and appreciation for the good things in your life and not taking them for granted. It is about acknowledging the kindness of others. As such, it helps us recognise that we are not solitary creatures and that others have helped and supported us along the way. Gratitude is an important character strength that is strongly correlated with happiness. It is a very positive emotion; after all it is hardly likely that a person can feel bitter, angry and resentful at the same time as feeling grateful. So to be able to experience this emotion more of the time can only be a good thing. As well as increasing our happiness, being grateful ensures we look after ourselves, our relationships and our things.

Gratitude is often regarded as a spiritual act and indeed is embraced by many religions. However, many positive psychology researchers have been investigating the science of gratitude and how engaging in gratitude activities can enhance happiness. What is emerging is that gratitude is not just for the spiritual, it is an intervention that can be beneficial to us all. For instance, research by Selig-

man found participants who wrote a gratitude letter to someone they had never properly thanked were happier and less depressed one month later compared to those who had simply written about an early memory. Lyubomirsky's research was even able to show that writing gratitude letters for just 15 minutes a week for 8 weeks were happier 6 months later. Other research has shown gratitude is associated with better life satisfaction, increased social support and may help prevent stress and depression.

Increased awareness of the good things and people in your life amplifies them so you come to see the world differently. Nothing has changed, just your attitude. There are a number of ways to go about this and they are not difficult to do.

Say thank you on a regular basis.

Keep a journal. Spend a few minutes each day reflecting and writing about the good things in your life. Try to notice things you would normally take for granted.

Consider all the different areas of

your life. List the things you are grateful for in that area. For example with work, you are grateful you only have a 20 minute commute to work.

Write a letter of gratitude to someone who has made a positive impact on your life. If you can, send it to them. Even better, read it to them.



Each day write down three good things about your life.

Step back and appreciate what you have. Such regular reflection can help prevent you taking your life for granted.

Recall a bad event and how you got through it.

Look for other people's good deeds and know that the world is better for that act. Express your gratitude – whether privately or publicly.

Reflect on how your life would be if you didn't have the people in it that you do have. Recognise how much poorer your life would be.

"Gratitude is associated with better life satisfaction"

Happy Mails:

Happy Mails have been created to give you time each week to reflect on the positive things in your life. Life can be very stressful and it is easy to focus solely on the negative. As such, this is an attempt to redress that imbalance,



providing you with tips and ideas to boost wellbeing and relieve stress. Each Happy Mail includes activities to try, which aim to enhance your personal strengths. I have designed Happy Mails based

on the ideas and principles of positive psychology.

Also available are Happy Mails for children aged 7 to 12. Opportunities are given for children to try new things and develop their strengths.

http://www.makethechange.com.au/community/positive/happy_mails

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● counselling online

About Make the Change

Make the Change is an online counselling service provided by Julia Barnard. It is located in Adelaide, Australia. It has been designed to enable an easy and accessible way for people to receive counselling. The site is called Make the Change to reflect the idea that counselling can assist you in making changes in your life, whether large or small. Such changes can be emotional, behavioural, practical or psychological.

If you browse through the website you will see many articles and items designed to increase wellbeing and happiness. I hope you will find something of interest that can benefit you in your life.

New to Make the Change

There have been a few new additions to Make the Change since my last issue. New articles include:

“[Taking Control of Your Television](#)” and “[Small Things Bring Happiness](#)”.

For people who use Google homepage, I have created a [happiness gadget](#) that uses my tips. You can also add it to your website.

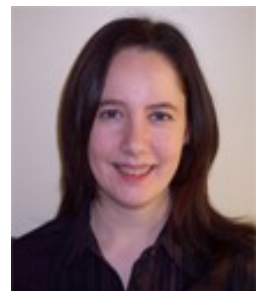
I have also started [reviews of books](#) I think are worth reading. Focus is given to positive psychology as well as books that will increase overall wellbeing and happiness.

Finally, you can now find me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

I hope you enjoyed this issue.

Best wishes

Julia Barnard



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