

Creating Happiness

To be happy and less stressed, be creative.

In his article on the importance of creativity in our lives, philosopher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says there's a direct link between creativity and happiness. That's because research shows that being creative stimulates the brain's pleasure centers.

Not only does being creative make us happy, it's a natural way to fight stress, to build confidence, and to learn more about ourselves and the world around us. The more we exercise the creative, right-half of our brain, the greater our ability to find creative solutions to difficult problems in our work or personal lives.

To cultivate creativity in your life, try the following.

Use creativity training techniques. Just as weight training makes a person stronger, creativity training can make a person more creative. Come up with as many uses as you can for a white paper bag. A chef's hat? A comet catcher? A lunch bag (of course)? Now push yourself to find 50 more. The technique is called brainstorming, and it's only one of many ways to exercise the creative side of your brain. To learn more techniques, type "creativity" into your favorite search engine or look for books on creativity at the library.

Express yourself. Find a way to express

yourself through writing, painting or doing a craft. But don't overlook other forms of expression such as restoring an antique car, gardening or solving a difficult math problem. Csikszentmihalyi says that whenever we lose track of time doing something just for the love of it, we're in a heightened sense of creativity that he calls "flow." Flow, he says, is an ultimate human experience that refreshes and makes us happy.

Unlearn ways that stifle creativity. James Higgins, author of *Escape from the Maze: Nine Steps to Personal Creativity* (New Management Publishing, 1997), says that to be creative, we should look beyond certain rules in life that stifle creativity. For example, place someone in a maze, and s/he will likely walk the corridors in search of an exit. After all, isn't that the rule one is supposed to follow when in a maze? But what about digging a hole and tunneling out, Higgins asks? Or pole vaulting? Or calling a friend with a helicopter so you can be lifted out? To unlearn ways that stifle creativity, look at the rules you follow, then look beyond them.

Change your environment. A new environment can give you a different, more creative outlook on something, such as a difficult problem. One software company encourages whole de-

partments to take a movie break when they're stuck on an especially vexing challenge. The employees carpool to the theater to see a movie with the understanding that no one will talk or think about the problem until they return to the office. Once back, managers say employees are so rejuvenated, they often solve the problem immediately.

Have creative things around you. Books of poetry, art, photography or architecture and other reflections of creativity can inspire your own creativity. But it's not enough just to have these resources around — you must turn to them for inspiration. Higgins says that people who believe that their lives have become routine and dull should make use of the many resources that can inspire passion and creativity.

Identify times when you are most creative. Just before a deep sleep and after a good workout are naturally occurring creative moments. A workout increases the flow of oxygen to the brain and leads to other physiological changes that encourage an active mind. And just before a deep sleep is a period of highly creative dream-like brain activity.

Sources: M. Csikszentmihalyi: "Happiness and creativity," *The Futurist*, S/O 1997. J. Higgins: *Escape from the Maze: Nine Steps to Personal Creativity*. (New York, NY: New Management Publishing, 1997).

Six Myths About Alcoholism

Myth #1: He can't be an alcoholic. He's too nice.

Fact: Many alcoholics are nice much of the time. Alcoholism is a physical, emotional and spiritual disease. In early stages of the disease, personality may not be affected all the time.

Myth #2: She's not an alcoholic. She only drinks wine.

Fact: Alcohol is alcohol, no matter what form it takes. The issue is not so much what a person drinks as when, where and why.

Myth #3: He can't be an alcoholic. I never see him with a drink.

Fact: Alcoholics often manage to keep their drinking habits secret from co-workers and employers.

Myth #4: She's so intelligent. How can she be an alcoholic?

Fact: There is no relationship between alcoholism and a person's intelligence.

Myth #5: She has too good a job to be an alcoholic.

Fact: Many alcoholics have good jobs.

Many are professionals and executives.

Myth #6: He can't be an alcoholic. He only drinks after work.

Fact: Many alcoholics schedule their drinking for after work and weekends.

Problem drinkers and alcoholics can get help by contacting the employee assistance program or by looking in the Yellow Pages under "Alcoholism Information and Treatment Centers" for more information and helpful resources.

The Benefits of Meditation

Mention relaxation techniques and the first thing to come to mind might be a breathing or visualization exercise.

But more people are now turning to meditation, a once uniquely Eastern technique — and for good reason. Research has long supported its health benefits. In one study, the health practices of 2,000 Iowans who meditated were compared to 6,000 people who didn't. Those who meditated had 44 percent fewer hospital admissions for mental health disorders and 87 percent fewer admissions for heart disease. While other lifestyle factors may account for the apparent good health of meditators, studies prove the benefits of meditation in fighting stress.

A phone company trained one employee group to meditate as a way to relieve stress and trained another group in various other stress-management techniques. After six months, those who meditate said they had a better handle

on life's problems and were better able to think and organize their thoughts. They also reported getting more enjoyment out of life.

To begin your meditation program, use the tips below. But be mindful: There are many similarities between starting a meditation program and starting an exercise routine. New meditation programs need time to work; don't expect immediate, dramatic results.

Meditation Basics

- Find a quiet space or room.
- Sit with your back as straight as possible, either in a chair or on the floor (with or without a cushion if you choose to sit on the floor).
- If sitting in a chair, place your feet flat on the floor. If sitting on the floor, sit with your legs crossed.
- Hold your hands in a comfortable position. You may choose to rest your hands on your knees or thighs.

- Keep your gaze on a comfortable spot or object in front of you. You may prefer to keep your eyes closed.
- While sitting with your back upright, keep your neck, shoulders and the rest of your body relaxed throughout the meditation.
- Keep your lips gently closed and your jaw relaxed.
- Breathe through your nose using abdominal breathing to maximize your oxygen intake. When you inhale, your abdomen should expand. When you exhale, pull your stomach in.
- Meditate for up to 20 minutes twice a day.
- Meditate on an empty stomach, if possible, or wait two hours after eating to meditate.
- You may want to play soft, instrumental music while meditating or wear headphones.

Reel Life Violence

Violence is an effective, fun and humorous way to solve conflicts.

Whoa! Who says?

If a child watched any or all of 74 G-rated animated feature films produced between 1937 and 1999 and available on videocassette, this is the conclusion they might draw.

Researchers from Harvard School of Public Health, Center for Risk Analysis found that all the films contained at least one act of violence. In total, there were 125 injuries, 62 of them fatal. The duration of the violent acts has increased

over the years. Almost all the films showed the good guys using physical force to overcome the bad guys. Only a couple of them, *Aladdin* and *Balto*, for example, showed the good guys using their wits to get the best of the bad guys.

The researchers recommend that children have low exposure to violence in films, and when they do watch these animated films (let's be honest here), that parents discuss the violence with the children before and after the film. Make it clear this is not the way to resolve conflicts in real life.

Parents can preview clips and read informed reviews about the violent content of these films at www.kids-in-mind.com and www.screenit.com. Diana Zuckerman, PhD, of the National Center for Policy Research for Women and Families in Washington, DC, reviewed both sites for Youth Today newspaper (September 2000). She reported that the Kids-in-Mind site "was shorter and yet had exactly the kinds of details that I needed to decide if a film was acceptable by my standards."

Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, May 24/31, 2000.



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