12 COOL IDEAS TO BOOST YOUR HAPPINESS

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IS THERE A SECRET TO FINDING HAPPINESS?

I’m asked the same question loads of different ways:

* How can I find true, lasting happiness?
* I’ve lost my mojo. How do I get it back?
* Can you help me get on the road to a more fulfilling life?

We’ve all been there at some point. You feel down on yourself or negative about the world—or you’ve just plain got a garden-variety case of the crankies. You know you have the capacity to be happy, but you just can’t seem to muster that zest for life.

So is there a secret to getting to a happier life? The answer is absolutely—if you’re willing to make a simple shift in your attitude and perspective. And I’m going to share with you 12 fun and easy ideas that can help get you on that path.

The great news is that you don’t need to sit down and read this book from start to finish. Here’s the deal:

* Take a few minutes and skim through the ideas until you find one that feels like it might be enjoyable. Or at least not terribly draining for you.

* Next, make a plan to try out this new idea. That’s right, before you jump in, you’ll need to give some thought to how you’re going to put this idea into practice. If it’s something you’re going to be doing daily or weekly, make a commitment by
putting it on your calendar to remind yourself. If it’s a one-time activity, don’t just leave it hanging out there to do “sometime”—set a target date to get it done.

* Finally, get to it. Seriously, give it a fair shake—a few weeks at the very least for an ongoing idea. If a couple of the ideas look like they might be cool, sure, by all means feel free to give ’em both a shot.

See what happens when you’ve spent a few weeks committed to this new practice. Notice whether you’re looking at the world a little differently, with a bit more positivity.

If you try something daily for two or three weeks and it doesn’t float your boat, no worries. Every idea won’t necessarily resonate with everyone. Don’t take it as a sign of failure or an indication that you can’t be happy. It just means that the exercise you chose isn’t the best use of your time at this point. Look through the ideas again and choose something else. Give it another shot and see what happens. You’ve really got nothing to lose.

The bottom line is to focus on the positive stuff in your life. Yes, it may feel mighty hard to get started. But these ideas—though they may seem simple and quaint—are proven effective and you will reap the rewards if you stick with it. Eventually you’ll likely find that you’ve rewired your brain to look for the positives in your life instead of focusing on the negatives.

As a coach, my mission is to encourage you to find the strengths in yourself and in your life, and try to use them in the most helpful way possible. So please—if you find that your situation is more serious than just a temporary stop in Unhappy Land and you can’t seem to get back on track, consider seeking professional help in your local area.

Sound like a plan? Okay, onward!
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THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

Let’s face it. It’s easy to get bogged down in silly day-to-day stuff, and get sucked into an abyss of self-pity and irritation. But there’s actually an easy escape from such a negative existence. It’s called gratitude. Living with a grateful attitude doesn’t mean everything in your life is peachy all the time. It just means that you’re taking time to focus on the positive things in your life—both big and small—as well as recognizing the kindnesses, delights and blessings that have come your way.

Having an attitude of gratitude has so many benefits! Here are three big ones:

1. **It reminds you of the positive things in your life**, including the outstanding people you’re lucky to have surrounding and supporting you, and the incredible blessings you’ve received.

2. **It can turn negative things into positive ones.** Rough day or week at work? Be grateful you have a job in the first place. Be grateful that you have an opportunity to learn and grow. Be grateful that you can use the challenges to become a stronger person. Learn to keep things in perspective and find the silver linings.

3. **It encourages you to thank others.** Expressing sincere appreciation feels good—both for you and the person you’re thanking.

Life can be a roller coaster ride, and having an attitude of gratitude helps keep things in perspective. Reflecting on gratitude is even more important and useful during tough times. It makes you pause, take a deep breath and realize just how much you have to be grateful for in the face of adversity or tragedy. Being grateful can help give you an
uplifting perspective and remind you of the strengths you possess that have gotten you through trying times before.

Interestingly, in the days immediately following the 9/11 tragedy, gratitude was found to be the second-most commonly experienced emotion, after sympathy. The ability to appreciate your life circumstances is a powerful coping strategy during stress and trauma, and while we often remember adversity with deep pain, gratitude helps us to heal a bit and gives us the strength to move on.

Do you naturally have an attitude of gratitude? If not, no worries. Interestingly, researchers have found that only about 50 percent of a grateful disposition is inherited from our genes, while 10 percent is due to life circumstances. That’s terrific news, because it means that the other 40 percent of our gratitude is within our own control!

_The first four ideas to boost your happiness are gratitude exercises. See if one of them sounds like something you might like to try._
How would you like to have a more positive and optimistic attitude toward your life? Experience fewer physical symptoms like headaches, muscle stiffness, stomach issues? Maybe even have a desire to exercise more? (Hasn’t happened for me yet, but hope springs eternal!) Believe it or not, research has shown that people who keep a weekly gratitude journal are more likely to get these benefits, as well as feel more satisfied with their lives and have more optimism about the upcoming week.

That’s right: keeping a gratitude journal is one of the most popular and effective ways to cultivate gratitude. It’s an outstanding opportunity to focus on the abundant gifts you’re fortunate to have, as opposed to harping on what’s lacking in your life. A number of studies have shown that people who tracked their gratitude once a week were happier after just six weeks. Yup, just by writing down a few things you’re grateful for on a weekly basis, you can increase your happiness in less than two months. And the best news is it’s easy to do!

Put aside a little time once a week to look back, reflect and write down a couple of things you’re thankful for over the previous seven days. Jot them on a sticky note or handwrite them in a pretty notebook. List them in a note on your laptop. Maybe text them to a friend who’s up for exchanging a weekly gratitude list. In whichever form you find most comfortable, just do it. Could be you’re thankful for a special person in your life; maybe it’s an accomplishment you achieved or some good news you received; perhaps you are grateful for a simple joy you observed or something new you’ve learned. You may struggle to think of one single thing—or maybe you’ll come up with a bunch right away! Either way, it’s a short, introspective break from the daily grind. As it becomes habit to note things you’re grateful for, you’ll notice that you look at the world a little differently—more optimistically and with gratitude that flows more easily.
There are no rules or directions for keeping a gratitude journal; you’re writing this only for yourself. But the more details you include in your entries, the better. According to gratitude expert Robert Emmons, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at UC Davis, there’s a nice benefit to being more descriptive: you get to relive the things you’re grateful for not only when you’re writing about them—but when you reread them months and years down the road. The more details you can add, the more vivid a picture you’re creating, and that can result in a bigger boost of happiness, especially when you’re looking back and may have forgotten some of the specifics. It also helps to prevent gratitude fatigue. As Emmons writes, “Go for depth over breadth. The journal is more than just a list of stuff.”

For several years, I kept a weekly gratitude journal on my blog. It morphed into the popular Gratitude Friday feature on my Facebook Page, where readers enthusiastically share what they’re grateful for during the previous week. It’s a cornerstone of our happiness community, and it brings cheer not only to those who contribute, but to those who read the hundreds of gratitude expressions each week. The things people share are genuinely heartwarming and inspiring.

In keeping my own gratitude journal, I’ve found that during gloomy weeks, although it’s much more difficult to focus on the slivers of sunshine, it’s ultimately helpful to dig deep and identify a few blessings I’m particularly grateful for. It has given me great comfort to realize that the good is still there, even during down times; you just have to stop and recognize it more mindfully.

Give it a try and commit to writing in a gratitude journal once a week for six weeks. See what you think!
This is a really useful exercise I’ve used successfully with my own family when one of them is in a funk. Sure, everyone gets grumpy once in a while. But when a full-on case of the self-pitying blues doesn’t subside for a few days, I ask that person to send me an email every night for a week or two listing at least three things they’re grateful for. For a mild case of the blues, sending just the first couple of emails often works like magic, snapping the unhappy person back to a happier reality. For a deeper funk, it can take a week or two for the person to take on a different perspective of their life and the world.

How can you do this? Well, when you’re feeling down in the dumps, all you need to do is make an arrangement with a friend or family member that every night for a week, you’re going to think of at least three things you were grateful for that day and email it to them. That’s it. It sets up an accountability that forces you to reflect on your day in a favorable way for a few minutes. What you write doesn’t have to be momentous or earthshattering—just a few positive things that you’ve witnessed or have happened that day. Maybe someone let you cut in front of them at the pharmacy checkout when you were in a hurry. Perhaps a sweet text from your niece brightened your day. Or just having a good hair day counts, silly as it may seem! Honestly, it doesn’t matter how petty or shallow it sounds. Just the act of recognizing your blessings—even the smallest gifts of the day—is a splendid start to finding happiness. Often, within a few days your eyes will be open to more and more positive moments in your daily life.
Here's an idea that might appeal to the craftier folks looking for a happiness boost. Instead of making a vision board of things you wish you had, create a gratitude board to remind yourself of who and what you're grateful to have already in your life.

The board itself can be anything you'd like, from a plain old office supply store cork board to a fancier framed magnetic board to a fabric-covered ribbon board. Makes no difference. The point is to cover it with things that fill you with gratitude. And be sure to hang it somewhere you pass by frequently so you get to see it often.

On my gratitude board, I love to post things like handwritten notes and cards I've received from friends, tickets from plays and concerts I've enjoyed, and mementos from events that have been meaningful to me. I also print and hang iPhone photos I've taken of people and places that make me happy, as well as screen shots of emails and texts that have made me smile or laugh. Menus from restaurants where I've had memorable meals sometimes wind up on my gratitude board, as do beautiful quotes and meaningful words. The key is to find and display things that bring you fulfillment and enrich your life.

At the end of each year, you can take down what you've accumulated, stash it in a big envelope or box for safekeeping, and start anew with a fresh, blank gratitude board for the year ahead.
One of my favorite quotes is by the wonderful author and poet, Maya Angelou:

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

In my study of positive psychology and gratitude, I’ve learned that one of the most powerful exercises you can do is to write a letter of gratitude to someone who has had a profound effect on your life. For some reason, though, I hadn’t been moved to write one until fairly recently. Sure, I’m grateful about many incredible people in my life, but not to the point where I really felt the need to sit down and share a little of my soul.

Unexpectedly running into a genuinely exceptional teacher from my high school days changed that. Getting a big smile and hug from him 30 years later triggered many positive memories of his Spanish classes and filled me with such an uplifting feeling. The very next morning, I woke up and handwrote a gratitude letter to this superb teacher (remarkable human being, actually!) who had had such a lasting influence on my life, and I gave it to him. It was easy to do, and it made me feel so happy to remember how capable and empowered he made the teenage me—a fairly insecure, under-confident ugly duckling—feel. That’s a pretty special teacher: someone who not only inspired me to be a better student back then, but inspired me to be a more authentic happiness coach today. It felt almost euphoric to let him know what a positive significance he had on me.

Since breaking through and writing that first gratitude letter, I’ve been energized to write more. I’m a habitual “thanker” anyway, but I find that now when I sit down to write even a simple thank you email or note, I try to express my gratitude in a more detailed and heartfelt way than simply scribbling a quick, cursory expression of appreciation. When I’m a bit more introspective, I often discover that what I initially think I’m thanking
someone for on the surface actually has deeper roots. I try to find the seeds of my grat-
itude, digging below the surface a bit to figure out what has touched me so profoundly. It’s a cathartic release to unlock that source of gratitude and be able to articulate it to a person who has influenced my life in some purposeful, soul-touching way.

You certainly don’t need to take it quite that seriously or deeply though! Think back over your life and remember an instance when someone did something for you for which you’re extremely grateful. For instance, think of the people you know, love or admire—spouses, parents, children, relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, teammates, employers, and so on—who have been especially kind to you but have never heard you express your gratitude. Sit down and capture that overflowing sense of gratitude in words. Write from the heart and tell them how they made you feel. Sincerity is much more important than eloquence!

Oh, and one final note: make sure you’re writing the letter because you’re spilling over with gratitude, not because you’re expecting any sort of acknowledgment from the recipient. Remember, the payoff is in your expressing gratitude, not in someone else’s appreciation of your sentiments.
LEARN TO SAVOR HAPPY MOMENTS

Shortly before my wedding, a friend gave me one of the most useful pieces of advice I’ve ever received.

“A few times during the evening,” she advised, “stop, look around and say to yourself, ‘This is my wedding!’ Otherwise it’ll all go by in a flash and end up being a blur.”

I tasked one of my bridesmaids with reminding me of this wisdom, and I have to say that it was a brilliant suggestion. All these years later, I still have vivid glimmers of lovely moments from the ceremony and celebration.

What my friend actually opened my eyes to was the art of savoring. Being mindful of your surroundings. Hitting the slow motion button for a brief moment to concentrate on and capture the whole experience. Who, if anyone, is there? What do they look like? What are they doing? What is the scenery like? The lighting? What noises or sounds do you hear? What does it smell like? Taste like? What are the textures and temperatures like? What emotions are you feeling? Then, file away that evocative sense memory and get back to whatever you were doing. It takes practice, and sometimes repeated reminders, but I promise if you can get the hang of it, you’ll be that much further down the path to lasting happiness.

Of course, you can savor extraordinary experiences, like special occasions and celebrations. But you can also savor the ordinary. Be more mindful of what’s going on around you as you go about your business. Savor things like quietness, stillness, springtime, nature’s beauty, the sound and smell of rain, Saturday morning at the farmer’s market, an exceptional meal, the beach, an evening of music and friends. You get it: the really good stuff in life.
The art of savoring is an important and powerful way to make time slow down a bit. When you learn to be mindful of your surroundings and your senses, you will appreciate your blessings more fully, both in the moment and later on down the road. It’s the little glimmers—the trickle of a fountain, the crackle of a campfire, the rosy sun melting into the horizon, the cuddliness of a down comforter, the aroma of cookies fresh out of the oven, the looks on the faces of those you love—that will stick with you and create rich, lasting sense memories to treasure.

So stop waxing poetic about how good it used to be. Stop fantasizing about how good it might be in the future. Savor how good it is right now. **Following are four ideas to help you make your moments matter.**

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**Stop waiting**

for Friday to arrive...

for summer to get here...

for that promotion to come through...

for a special someone to enter your life.

Happiness shows up
when you stop waiting for it
and start living in the moment.

*Savor life right now.*

AndreaReiser.com
What’s a Happy Jar? It’s a place to collect reminders of happy moments—maybe something fun that happened or a major accomplishment or a milestone or something that you’re looking forward to. You write down your happy moment on a little slip of paper, put it in the jar and that’s all there is to it. Then when you need a little dose of cheer, you can pull out a few slips and savor some happy memories.

It’s super-easy to make a Happy Jar. Use any jar you have handy and decorate it if you like. I keep some pens and paper slips next to the jar so it’s easy for everyone in my family to share happy thoughts quickly and often. The key is to put the jar somewhere visible and accessible so it encourages lots of happy sharing. We have ours on a chest in the kitchen, and it’s been popular from day one. It’s actually so intriguing that even friends and visitors have added happy moments to our jar!

Here are 9 terrific reasons to make a Happy Jar:

1. It reminds you to focus on happy, positive stuff—and focusing on happy, positive stuff lifts your spirits.

2. It’s something that all family members can do. Even little ones can draw a picture of something that makes them happy.

3. It’s a great way to count and remember your blessings.

4. It elevates the small things that brighten your day.

5. It reinforces gratitude—and an attitude of gratitude can increase happiness levels by 25%! 
6. It gives you a place to share and savor joy by yourself or with your family.

7. It’s a great mood booster! It brings a smile to reach in and read random happiness slips, especially when you’re feeling down.

8. It reminds you of what makes you and your family members happy.

9. It’s 100% fun, no stress, totally optional, quick—and who can resist a big jar of sweetness that has zero calories?

So what are you waiting for? Get yours going today!
A project started by a non-profit foundation with a mission to make the world a happier place, the purpose of the 100 Happy Days Challenge is to take a picture of something that—duh!—makes you happy every day for 100 days. You’re encouraged to share your daily pictures on one or more of your own social media accounts with the #100HappyDays hashtag, as a means to keep track of your progress, as well as amuse and enchant your friends and followers. Besides getting lots of happiness and optimism benefits by consciously focusing on something happy for all those days in a row, at the end you’ll have 100 happy moments to remember. That’s pretty cool!

I know a few people who have stretched the project over six months or more, posting only on days that they found something that made them deeply happy. On the other hand, when I did the challenge, I started on my birthday in May and I went for 100 days in a row into late August. I posted at least one picture (sometimes more) every day to my Instagram page with the hashtag #100HappyDays, and lo and behold, 100 days later I had this wonderful visual collection of things that made me happy or sparked a happy memory. Some days were more of a challenge than others, but then I’d walk around my house or my yard and find something that made me smile—a book, a flower, a picture. The daily photo became so much of a habit that I really missed the routine for the first few days after the project ended! (I quickly realized I can always take and post photos of things that make me happy!)

So what to do with these 100 images? Well, inspired by a great discount from an online photo printing site, I decided to make mine into a photo book. That way, I figured I could flip through it any time I choose for a happiness boost. It took a couple of days to gather the photos, upload them and design each page with backgrounds, borders and text. Although I was tempted to slap it together quickly and get it done, I con-
tinually reminded myself to slow down, savor the creative experience, and make sure each page was exactly the way I wanted it. The book is gorgeous—even with mostly iPhone-quality photos! The best part is that I’ve got this personal record of a wonderful summer by the beach with my family, which gives me lots of cheer on down days or when I’m missing my college boys or when snow is piling up outside my window.

I highly recommend the 100 Happy Days project. It takes a little discipline to stay on track, but it’s truly the best birthday gift I’ve ever given to myself.
A while back, I got a lovely handwritten note in the mail from a sweet elderly acquaintance. She had read an item in our local newspaper about an award one of my sons had received, and sent the clipping along with her congratulations. Also in the envelope she had tucked a little yellow balloon with a smiley face on it. Her thoughtfulness made my day, and I was so touched that I decided to post about it on Facebook. I blew up the yellow smiley balloon to take a picture for the Facebook post, and believe it or not, for the next two weeks that silly party store balloon became everyone’s favorite object in the house! My teenage boys volleyed it back and forth to see how long they could keep it in the air. They tried to spike it at each other. They did head-butts with it. I caught one guy repeatedly bouncing it off his nose like a dolphin. They played with it in my office. In the hallway. In the family room. One night I was watching TV in bed when one of them came in to kiss me goodnight carrying the balloon. He he tossed it to me and we went back and forth a few times. Such a simple pleasure, yet without fail, it made even the grouchiest among us smile.

Can simple pleasures actually make you happier? Indeed they can, according to Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project* and *Happier at Home*. “It’s not life changes like a new house or a fancy car that make the most impact, but sometimes little things like the smell of an orange that give the biggest happiness boost.” says Rubin. She adds, “Over and over, people tell me something like cleaning out a medicine cabinet gives them a huge jolt of good cheer and energy.”

The yellow balloon inspired me to come up with a list of 101 simple pleasures that might make you smile or will perhaps spark ideas of your own. Of course, simple pleasures aren’t universal, so one person’s pleasures won’t necessarily bring the same boost of happiness to others. But the possibilities are limitless. We grow so busy and rushed that we become jaded, overlooking these small momentary cheers and taking them for
granted. By noticing and savoring life’s simple joys, you can effectively boost your happiness level. Keep your eyes open and challenge yourself to genuinely appreciate the little flashes of delight that are part of our everyday lives.

1. Feeling the warm sand on your feet at the beach
2. Seeing a baby light up with a giant grin
3. Getting a handwritten note in the mail
4. Listening to your favorite music
5. Warm, fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies
6. A magnificent sunrise or sunset
7. Cuddling
8. Good chocolate
9. Holding hands
10. Laughing until you nearly wet your pants
11. Inside jokes
12. Spending time with people you adore
13. A cloudless sky
14. Your favorite flower
15. Getting a call or email from someone you love out of the blue
16. Watching your favorite childhood TV show
17. Singing loudly in the car
18. Hugging your babies, no matter how old they are
19. Stargazing at night
20. Lying in bed listening to the rain
21. Finding money you didn’t know was in your pocket
22. An icy glass of lemonade (or a frosty beer) on a hot summer day
23. Getting a great parking space
24. Sleeping in
25. Fresh bed sheets
26. Putting on clothes straight from the dryer
27. A breathtaking view—water, mountain, cityscape, forest, whatever
28. A picnic
29. Plump summer tomatoes
30. Bodysurfing
31. A fireworks display
32. Making someone smile
33. Kissing
34. The farmers market
35. Helping someone in need
36. The smell of a baby’s head
37. Building a sandcastle
38. Watching clouds float by
39. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich
40. Checking something off your to-do list
41. The cool side of the pillow
42. The smell of a thunderstorm (“petrichor”)
43. Waking up and finding the alarm isn’t going off for another three hours
44. Swinging on a lazy porch swing
45. Snuggling under the covers on a stormy day
46. A perfectly-timed, cozy snowstorm
47. Relaxing in front of a roaring fire
48. A great book
49. A long walk on a cool day
50. Cherry blossom trees
51. A clean closet
52. Unexpected good news
53. The smell of a barbecue
54. Bubble wrap
55. An afternoon nap
56. Finding a personal treasure at the bottom of a drawer or in the back of a closet
57. Hitting a bunch of green lights in a row
58. A brand-new 64 box of Crayolas
59. Cookie dough
60. Your favorite movie
61. Fresh-picked berries, still warm from the sun
62. Not having to be anywhere
63. Getting a giant hug just when you need it
64. Minty breath
65. Putting on a snuggly sweatshirt after a chilly afternoon at the beach
66. A long conversation with a favorite friend
67. The rare perfect errand day
68. The smell of fresh-cut grass
69. Tears of joy
70. A fabulous bottle of wine
71. Collecting sea shells
72. Bubble juice and a bubble wand
73. A newly-fallen blanket of snow
74. Making s’mores
75. The smell of fresh-baked cookies or bread
76. Vibrant autumn foliage
77. A foot massage
78. Licking the batter
79. Seeing a rainbow
80. Candlelight
81. Spring flowers blooming
82. Hot chocolate on a cold day
83. Finding something you made when you were a kid
84. Puppy kisses
85. Randomly bumping into someone you haven’t seen in a while
86. A good hair day
87. When something you were going to buy anyway is on sale
88. Getting a caring customer service person on the phone
89. A balloon
90. Coming across an old photo that makes you smile
91. The season premiere of your favorite show
92. Riding with the top down
93. A chocolate ice cream cone
94. Taking a shower after a day at the beach
95. When someone lets you know they’re thinking of you
96. The smell of a sea breeze
97. Hearing an old song you used to love
98. A bright full moon over the water
99. When a baby falls asleep in your arms
100. Rereading a favorite childhood book
101. City lights at night
Another story for you.

The date was February 12, 1993. I opened the door for a blind date—and it turned out to be the door to the most beautiful future. Standing there holding a single rose was the guy I had spoken to for an hour and a half on the phone and couldn’t wait to meet in person. Accustomed to dating tall guys, I was wearing high black heels, and there he on my front stoop, looking quite handsome, but surprisingly shorter than I had imagined. A few hours later, when the patient waiter at the restaurant where we had eaten dinner gently nudged us to vacate our table, we were mutually enchanted.

I had a ritual where I called my grandmother the day after a blind date to give her the scoop. The moment I awoke that next morning I grabbed the phone to tell her I was pretty sure I had just gone on my last first date. I then dialed my mom and told her we needed to go shopping that very afternoon—for some new shoes with shorter heels!

The magic was instantaneous. We were engaged seven weeks later (yup...seven weeks!), and married that Labor Day weekend. Four kids and all these years later, though, the anniversary of our first date is still precious to us. We celebrate it every year in some fashion—and I’m ever grateful I answered the door that fateful evening.

When you take the opportunity to celebrate life’s ups, it somehow works to mitigate the downs. There are plenty of big and small occasions you can seize to celebrate throughout the year, aside from the obvious stuff like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, holidays, major milestones and events like graduations, engagements and retirements. Many are one-time occasions or “firsts,” while others are recurring and can become family traditions to commemorate. My sweet Grandpa used to cut a greeting card in
half and mail it to me on my half birthday! I still think of him and smile on the 15th of November every year.

Of course, a celebration doesn’t need to involve something extravagant like a party or an elaborate dinner or a fancy bottle of champagne. It could be a date for ice cream or a special card or a few balloons or a batch of brownies. Just something that makes the person (or people) feel honored and the occasion feel more special than a garden-variety day. Making the ordinary extraordinary.

With that celebration spirit in mind, here are 36 non-birthday, non-anniversary, non-holiday occasions to consider celebrating:

1. First date anniversary
2. The last day of school
3. A great report card
4. The last night together before everyone goes off to camp or a summer program or college or a trip
5. The first night together after everyone comes home from camp or a summer program or college or a trip
6. Visits from the Tooth Fairy
7. A promotion
8. College acceptances
9. Completing a major business deal
10. Nailing an audition
11. A health triumph or recovery
12. The anniversary of a major health triumph
13. Finishing a big project
14. A first haircut or a haircut for a Locks of Love donation
15. Accomplishing a personal goal like delivering a speech or mastering a difficult piece of piano music or running a 5K
16. When someone special comes to visit
17. Moving into a new house or finishing a renovation
18. Achieving a diet or fitness goal
19. Getting a role in a play or a spot on the team
20. Opening night
21. Closing night
22. Winning a special game, match or tournament
23. Conquering a fear
24. Being quoted or having a family member’s picture appear in a positive newspaper article
25. Checking off a bucket list dream
26. Getting a driver’s permit or license
27. The end of a sports season
28. Music recitals
29. Tuesday. Or Friday. Or Wednesday. You get where I’m going with this.
30. Receiving an award or honor
31. The anniversary of a pet joining the family
32. Getting elected or appointed to a position
33. Half-birthdays
34. Being accepted to a special program
35. Passing a significant test or certification exam
36. Just because… (My folks threw a fabulous party a few years ago “just because” they wanted to surround themselves with all the family and friends they love. It was the best!

There are exactly as many special occasions in life as we choose to celebrate.
BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE

The Dalai Lama shares two wonderful quotes:

“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

“Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.”

What exactly is compassion and how does it contribute to happiness? At its essence, compassion is the feeling you get when you sense another person’s suffering and you want to help out in some way or provide relief. It’s a genuine concern about someone’s welfare. Being compassionate helps us appreciate and feel grateful for the good stuff in our own lives. It makes us feel useful and helpful, giving us a meaningful way to use our strengths and talents. Compassion connects people, and it’s that social connection and community with others that results in a boost of happiness.

Kindness is a gesture of genuine thoughtfulness or consideration toward another person. It’s a way of connecting with people we come in contact with in our daily lives, if even for just a moment. Acts of kindness don’t need to be complicated—they can be as simple as a warm smile or an encouraging word or a sincere compliment. Whether the act is spontaneous or planned, the key is to be aware of the needs and feelings of those around us and find opportunities to help them out or spread cheer. Being kind to others strengthens our connection with them and provides not only a source of support but often, a brief twinkle of joy.

One of the most beautiful results of being kind and compassionate is the positive chain reaction it can trigger. When you’re kind to someone, they may feel grateful and inspired to show kindness to someone else, who in turn may pass along more kindness and compassion, and so on. And on an individual level, the boost of happiness you feel
from engaging in one kind act makes it more likely that you’ll do additional kind deeds. So it’s like an endless loop: kindness makes you happy, and happiness makes you kind.

The four ideas that follow will help inspire acts of kindness and compassion that will benefit you and those you love, as well as those you might not even know.
Here’s a story you might relate to.

My whole family needed to get passports. A lot of forms, originals, copies, and unsmiling 2” x 2” photos ensued. We followed the directions on the State Department website to make sure we had everything we needed (and then some!). I gathered up my husband, my kids, my big envelope with all the paperwork, and we were fourth in line at the suburban post office down the road just before it opened one Tuesday morning.

At exactly 9:00 a.m., Maria, a frowning postal worker with the key, unlocked the door. She didn’t open the glass door or acknowledge the first guy in line, mind you, she simply clicked the lock, turned around and walked away. Perhaps there are rules that prohibit her from touching the door handle. And that prohibit her and her co-workers from smiling.

Anyway. Within a few minutes, it was our turn to approach Maria, who appeared to be the lone counter worker that morning. We greeted her cheerily. I smiled and told her I loved the adorable blue North Face knit beanie she was wearing. She stared back at me blankly. I announced that we were there to submit passport applications and that we had all the documents necessary.

She glowered at us. “Do you have an appointment?”

Uh, no. Your website doesn’t say we need an appointment.

“Lemme get my supervisor.”

Oh goody. That’ll be a treat.
Eventually Mr. Supervisor came out. By the looks of things, I’m guessing his first name was Cranky. And his middle name was I Don’t Care.

He proceeded to inform us, with classic stink-eye, that we needed to make an appointment and come back some other time. He pointed out that there were other customers (there were, ahem, exactly three in line) who needed to be served, insinuating that our needs were not important. I protested politely but firmly, because the branch’s website did not indicate that an appointment was necessary for passports during weekday counter hours.

Mr. Supervisor sauntered away while I was still speaking, clearly unmoved by my case. Maria, on the other hand, must hate Mr. Supervisor more than she hates customers. As soon as he was out of sight, she whispered that if it were up to her, she’d be happy to do all of them, but that he was a pain in the butt so she didn’t want him on her case. And then she offered to get one processed.

It took less than two minutes. As promised, I had every stitch of documentation. When she finished, there was nobody waiting in line because another counter worker had come out to help the three people in line. So we asked if she could do another one.

Her first reaction was that Mr. Supervisor would be mad. But when we told her that we’d continue only until there was a line of other customers, she agreed. We listened and sympathized with her while she grumbled about being overworked and understaffed. You could see the stress and misery melt away as she vented, and we politely validated her work woes.

Maria was speedy and efficient, and in less than 15 minutes, she had processed all of our applications. There was still no line of customers. Ultimately we hadn’t held anyone up. She was smiling pleasantly as we all expressed our sincere appreciation on the way out. I wished her a wonderful day and told her I hoped someone would make her day, as she’d made ours.

While the post office experience had begun dreadfully, I was grateful it ended in such a positive and productive way. I could only imagine the endless stream of wretchedly
behaved patrons Maria served in that gloomy postal facility every day, and I wanted her to have something tangible to remember that she’s appreciated. I keep a box of greeting cards with cool sayings just for occasions like this, and I pulled one out that said, “You Made My Day.” Inside the blank card I wrote a short note to Maria, thanking her again, and dropped it off to her along with a giant cup of Starbucks (er, I guess that would make it a Venti?!). She was blown away that we’d actually come back just to express our gratitude.

It literally took just 15 minutes out of my day to give her a proper thank you, but it was important to me that she knew she was appreciated. I really hope we brightened her day a little and made her smile. I know it gave me a big boost of happiness.

So how can you become kinder and more compassionate to people you know and love? To people you know and don’t particularly like? To people you don’t know at all?

1. **Listen!** One of the most generous things you can do is give someone your undivided attention and an attitude of warmth and understanding. Instead of letting your mind go to how you’ll respond to someone, focus on what they’re saying. It can be incredibly healing for someone to know that they can speak and have another person truly hear what they’re expressing without judgment and with unconditional love.

2. **Put yourself in someone else’s shoes.** Much of the time, we’re so focused on ourselves that we’re unaware of the pain another person carries inside. Try to imagine someone else’s quiet personal suffering and treat them graciously and with sensitivity.

3. **Find commonalities with other people.** Our compassion increases when we find common connections with others. When we are socially connected, it becomes easier for us to draw an association, no matter how small, between someone suffering and ourselves, and therefore the compassion we feel for their suffering is amplified.

4. **Soften your being.** Smile more. Complain less. Try to be a comforting teddy bear instead of a prickly porcupine.
5. **Say thank you!** By thanking someone, you make the other person feel important and valued, raising their self-esteem and improving their self-image. At the same time, your own attitude improves and your gratitude level increases. In addition, there’s a cool phenomenon called the “Law of Reciprocity,” which essentially says that when someone does something nice for you, you’ll have the psychological urge to do something nice for them in return. Often the simple act of saying “thank you” is enough inspiration to get the ball rolling. Remember, a little appreciation goes a long way.

6. **Slow down.** It’s hard, if not impossible, to do #1-5 above when you’re going a million miles an hour. Pause and consider what might be going on with others. Reflect. Be mindful. Think before you speak or write.

Pick one or two—or all six—of these suggestions and put them into practice for a few weeks. See what happens!
Do you have a double standard for kindness? Are you exceedingly kind to others—consoling them, complimenting them, lifting them up—but find it challenging or even impossible to be kind to yourself? Well, it shouldn’t be that way. Because interestingly, the kinder you are to yourself, the more you’ll ultimately be able to give to others.

There’s somewhat of a stigma about the idea of being kind to yourself. Some feel it shows personal weakness. Some perceive it as being self-indulgent or self-absorbed. Others equate it with letting yourself off the hook too easily. But making a positive change in how you treat yourself can lead to a happier and less stressful life. Self-kindness and self-acceptance are empowering acts. You will actually increase your confidence and self-esteem. Your relationships will likely improve, and others will treat you better. You will begin to see that you deserve good things in life.

The truth is that kindness to yourself is kindness to others. Taking care of yourself has positive ripple effects. Think about it: you can’t help anyone if you’re running on empty. The happier you are and the more inner strengths you possess, the better equipped you’ll be to show patience, love, forgiveness and support to others.

Here are 10 ways to be kind to yourself:

1. **Take care of your body.** That means getting enough sleep, exercising, eating well, drinking sensibly and avoiding harmful habits. That’s literally job #1 in being kind to yourself.

2. **Carve out time for yourself.** Indulge a little and do something nice for yourself at least once a week. Treat yourself to some “me” time, even if it’s just a 10-minute break to listen to a few of your favorite songs or taking a short walk around
the block. Do something pampering like a manicure or a hot bath. Maybe you’re into physical activity like hiking or biking or running or yoga. How about enjoying a creative outlet like singing or drawing or knitting? Perhaps reading is your pleasure, whether getting lost in the latest thriller or paging through magazines. Your choice. Whatever feels good to you. And seriously, schedule it on your calendar so you don’t let yourself skip it.

3. Allow yourself to laugh and smile. It’s great for you because it releases endorphins, which are the “feel good” hormones.

4. Acknowledge and celebrate your own accomplishments. Yup, it’s okay to recognize how amazing you are! If a friend or family member accomplished something, you’d take the time to praise them, wouldn’t you? Why are you any less deserving? The benefit of being familiar with your strengths is that it will actually enable you to harness them and put them to good use when you face challenges and obstacles.

5. Appreciate yourself for what you are rather than being critical for what you lack or wish you were. One of my favorite affirmations I learned from a beautiful Broadway actress who repeats, “You are enough, you are so enough, it’s unbelievable how enough you are!” Print out that phrase—or something self-encouraging that you like better—and hang it on your bathroom mirror or tape it to your computer screen. Remind yourself of this a few times a day and eventually you’ll be able to believe it.

6. Be gentle with yourself. Acknowledge your fragility. Give yourself the time you need to savor or reflect or process or heal. Breathe.

7. Learn to say no. But learn to do it graciously. Sure, it requires personal strength to decline requests and risk disappointing someone, but it’s so important to value your time and take control of your commitments. Set your own priorities and don’t feel bad or guilty about distancing yourself from negative people or situations. Learn to be in tune with what’s already on your plate, and be proactive about managing your stress level. This takes confidence, conviction and practice, but it’s a skill totally worth learning.
8. **Slow down!** As a culture we have somehow glorified the idea of being busy. But busy-ness is not a badge of honor, importance, popularity or success. It’s perfectly okay—and actually healthier and preferable—to not be busy. Build rest and downtime into your schedule. Literally write it into your calendar if you need to!

9. **Set small, achievable goals for yourself.** Break down overwhelming projects or tasks into more do-able, manageable chunks. Take one day at a time, one step at a time. Believe in yourself that you will get it all done.

10. **Replace your inner critic with your inner cheerleader.** You know the voice inside your head that sabotages you and everything you try to do? Turn down the volume until it goes away. Learn to turn up the volume on the encouraging voice that tells you how much you rock. Congratulate yourself on a job well done. Remind yourself that you’re awesome and that you can do it. As author Brené Brown so eloquently says, “Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love.”

Choose a few of these practices to focus on consciously for several weeks. As you get the hang of them, add in some more. Mastering many of these will help you become the best YOU you can be!
This is one of the easiest and most fun ideas of all: put together a *cheer up kit* for yourself that you can pull out whenever you need a lift.

What’s a cheer-up kit? Anything you want it to be! Think about things that make you smile or give you soothing comfort, and gather them together in a plastic storage bin, canvas bag, manila envelope or anything else that works for you. You can add to it at any time. Tuck it someplace in your house or office, or maybe you want to create a portable kit that you can take with you for lonely moments on business trips. It’s all up to you. When you need a little pick-me-up, take out your stash and immerse yourself in so many of your favorite things.

Want 32 ideas to get you rolling?

1. A favorite book from childhood or adulthood
2. A DVD of your favorite movie or TV series
3. Photos of people you adore from your own life or celebrities you dig
4. Photos of your pets
5. Photos of cute animals from the internet
6. Photos of events that made you happy or proud
7. Photos of your happy place(s)
8. Photos of breathtaking scenery like beaches, mountains, sunsets, flower fields
9. Lyrics to your favorite song(s)
10. A CD of your favorite music or a playlist of your favorite happy songs
11. A tiny sample of your favorite perfume
12. A scented candle or a small can of your favorite scent (they even sell room spray that smells like pumpkin pie, cut grass, Christmas trees, bonfires, new baby, turpentine and other evocative aromas!)
13. Ticket stubs or mementos from favorite concerts, games, shows, movies, museums, events or venues
14. A piece of memorabilia or even a logo from your favorite sports team
15. Chocolate
16. Cards or letters you’ve received from special people
17. Awards or certificates of your special achievements
18. Nostalgic items from your life that inspire happy memories like an old worn teddy bear or a piece of fabric from your wedding gown or the hand-knit hat that all your newborn babies wore home from the hospital
19. A coloring book and a set of markers, crayons or colored pencils
20. Packets of aromatherapy bath beads
21. Colorful, happy quotes or poems
22. A jar of bubbles
23. A recipe for cookie dough
24. A list of funny YouTube clips
25. A list of your own favorite simple pleasures
26. A small jar of beach sand or ocean water
27. Wine bottle labels from special occasions
28. Fuzzy, cozy socks
29. A cute stuffed animal that makes you smile
30. A harmonica or kazoo
31. Service medals, badges or awards from yourself or loved ones
32. Keepsakes you’ve collected from favorite trips
Seriously, if nothing else up to this point floats your boat, just make it your mission to smile more. Yup. That’s it. No special instructions. Just do it.

Smiling’s simple. Smiling’s free. Smiling’s good for you, inside and out.

Wait, good for you? How’s that, you ask?

A full smile involving the muscles around your eyes changes your brain activities to produce conditions that are associated with a happy mood. What results inside your body is a reduction in stress-inducing hormones, an increase in mood-enhancing hormones, and lower blood pressure. Really. Do you reach for a bite of chocolate from time to time to enhance your mood?

Believe it or not, British researchers found that just one smile can generate the same level of brain stimulation as up to 2,000 chocolate bars! Holy Ghirardelli! The same study also showed that smiling can be as stimulating to your brain as randomly receiving up to $25,000 in cash. Mmm-hmmm. Imagine the euphoria of having someone hand you 25 grand because, say, you just happened to be the one millionth customer at your local supermarket. One smile can be as powerful as that to your brain’s state of happiness. Pretty cool, right?

In addition, smiling positively affects the way people perceive you. Studies show that when you smile, you appear to others to be more likeable, more courteous and—get this—even more competent.

Smiling is contagious, too, meaning that when others see you smile, they are more inclined to smile. When someone smiles in response to your smile, they end up looking good and feeling good as well. So there’s special positive power to passing along a
smile, like a gift that keeps on giving.

And want to know the best secret of all? You get all these benefits even when you fake a smile! That's right, your smile doesn't have to be based on genuine emotion. All you have to do is curve your lips upward, scrunch your cheeks and crinkle the corners of your eyes. Bingo!

You honestly have nothing to lose. So put on a happy face!
Often, people imagine that if only they could get married...or if only they could buy a bigger house...or if only they could have a baby or get a raise or a new iPhone or a better job—whatever the “if only” may be—then life would finally be perfect. At long last, they’d achieve sustained happiness.

The undeniable truth, however, is that happiness that’s tied to achieving a life change or acquiring something material is fleeting. In other words, the happy high you get from getting engaged or scoring that better job or buying that bigger house—that thing that you have long imagined will finally result in your lasting happiness—wears off with time. Sometimes the happiness boost fades within days or weeks, sometimes it lasts a bit longer. Newlyweds, for instance, get a big boost of happiness that lasts, on average, about two years. But study after study shows that people eventually “reset” after they experience positive events and circumstances, returning to their genetically determined happiness baseline.

Do you live your life with the “if only” mindset? Think about for a moment. Say you set a goal to lose 15 pounds. Do you find lasting happiness when you achieve your weight loss goal? Or like so many folks, do you get there and wind up feeling like, “Meh, that didn’t change my life so much. I think I’d be happy if only I dropped five or ten more,” immediately setting your sights ahead to something greater? Or perhaps you’ve managed to buy a home in a neighborhood you’ve always loved, but shortly after you move in, you notice that everyone else in the neighborhood drives a nicer car or has a beautiful in-ground pool. Are you right back on the aspirational treadmill because other people have things that you don’t? If this sounds familiar, you can see why circumstantial happiness—the boost of joy you get when you achieve a goal or something good happens in your life—can fade so quickly.
The thrill of victory, the ecstasy of falling in love, the pleasure of that “new car smell”—it all lessens with time. So how can you slow the happiness effect from fading? Here are 7 ways to make happiness last:

1. **Practice gratitude.** When you notice or appreciate the good things in your life and consider them to be blessings, you’re practicing gratitude. Pausing to appreciate the good things you’ve got going on—as opposed to focusing on what you could potentially have or what other people have—helps you from taking things for granted.

2. **Savor the present.** Stop looking ahead to what could be or what the next step is and relish the here-and-now. Enjoy and invest yourself in the moment. Be present. Celebrate!

3. **Have a positive and optimistic perspective.** Focus on the good things in yourself, in others, and in your life circumstances. Have a plan for dealing with adversity, but don’t dwell on all the things that could go wrong. You are a strong, capable person and you will deal with things if and when they happen. Look for the silver linings in everything. Recognize that it’s okay not to be perfect.

4. **Don’t overthink your successes and triumphs.** When you try to analyze or make sense of why something happened, you risk sucking all the joy out of it. Instead, savor your good fortune rather than trying to explain it.

5. **Be kind and helpful.** Studies have shown that being altruistic stimulates two areas of the brain associated with pleasure, euphoria, trust and cooperation. People who regularly practice a variety of kind acts benefit from increased well-being.

6. **Cultivate and nurture interpersonal relationships.** Taking the time to strengthen, nourish and enjoy marriage and friendships builds social bonds as well as self-esteem. Interestingly, research shows that flourishing relationships are characterized by how someone reacts to a friend’s good news rather than their disappointments or losses. Genuinely appreciating a friend or partner’s triumphs and joys appears to bolster the relationship and intensify the pleasure and satisfaction you get from it.
7. **Enjoy the journey on the way to your goal.** Sure, there will be struggles and challenges along the road, but instead focus on the new skills you’re developing, new opportunities that have come your way, your personal growth and mastery, new learning you’re acquiring. Happiness isn’t a destination, it’s a way of travelling.

So there you have it. A bunch of cool happiness-boosting ideas. A little bit of preaching about the importance of gratitude, savoring and being kind. A handful of rambling (but hopefully not too sleep-inducing!) personal anecdotes and stories.

My most heartfelt wish is that you find at least one wonderful pearl within this book that inspires you to pursue a happier path. Remember, life is what happens while you’re waiting expectantly for the next big thing on the horizon to come to fruition. Make today count. Make every day count! Share with the world your awesome self, your smile and your grateful, kind heart.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANDREA REISER

While I call myself a happiness coach, others refer to me as a “life brightener” or “happiness cheerleader.” Having studied positive psychology and the science of happiness, as well as trained as a life coach, I know that each of us is in charge of our own happiness. It’s my pleasure to help you get on the right path by sharing simple, useful tips and techniques that will boost happiness and lead to greater personal fulfillment.

I have a B.S. in Mass Communication/PR from Boston University, and I’m a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. My most recent book, Letters From Home: A Wake-Up Call for Success & Wealth (Wiley, 2010), has been described as “required reading for all parents,” and a “blueprint for raising healthy, happy, productive, and loving children.” A contributor to The Huffington Post, I’ve written for and been interviewed in a variety of print and online publications, including Woman’s Day, Parents.com, Care.com, Chicago Tribune, and The Stir. I’ve appeared on Fox Business and News12 CT, as well as on dozens of radio shows across the country.

On the personal side, I’ve been married since 1993 to the same guy who proposed just seven weeks after we met, and I’m the proud mom of four sons, including identical twins, who are all now in high school and college. I had a preventive mastectomy in 2007 after I lost my mom to breast cancer and learned I carried the BRCA-1 gene mutation, and I’m always willing to talk to other women facing a similar decision. I adore Broadway theatre, especially musicals (recent favorites include Hamilton, The King & I, and Something Rotten). And don’t groan, but my lifelong guilty pleasure is the music of Barry Manilow. In my spare time I’m on a never-ending quest to create the world’s yummiest chocolate chip cookie. Home for me is Westport, Connecticut, as well as by the beautiful beach where I grew up in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

The best place to get to know me is at www.AndreaReiser.com/About.