



## Practices...

### The Pathway to Well Being

The activities and practices suggested in this booklet have been around for a long time. They have been recommended from many sources as activities that can improve one's quality of life. Many scientific studies now prove that when practiced over a long period of time they create habitual positive brain wave patterns that produce a healthy supply of well being chemicals: dopamine, serotonin, epinephrine and others. This chemistry can continually replace the stress chemicals of cortisol and adrenaline. These activities train the brain to move to positive thought patterns almost automatically, replacing recurring negative thought patterns. Daily practice of these activities can be an effective remedy for unhealthy stress, anxiety, depression or loss of hope and desire and set us on a path to happiness, serenity, security, thriving and well being.

To achieve the optimum result, practice at least 5 of these activities each day for **30 days**, then for the rest of your life! You need not do the same activity each day. Journal your insights if possible. It is helpful to have a partner with whom you can check in about your progress. As time goes by you will want to expand and deepen your activities. Don't give up. It's about time to *STAY* happy!

## **1. The “Scan”**

We tend to filter all information we are receiving depending on our mind set. Practice being aware of your reality...positive or negative...by a gentle “scan”. Stop what you are doing and quiet your mind. Notice if your thoughts, your “self-talk” are negative or positive. When you are aware of any negativity...worry, fear, criticism, self-doubt, catastrophic thinking, anger, etc...gently move your thoughts and “self-talk” to anything you can observe that is positive, for example “The blue sky is beautiful” or “I’m grateful for my breath”, etc. This takes practice but it DOES WORK!

## **2. Three things you are grateful for.**

Each day choose three new things you’re grateful for and why you are grateful. Writing or typing your list helps increase your optimism. And the brain needs at least 15 seconds to shift its chemistry. The reason why that’s powerful is you’re training your brain to scan the world in a new pattern. You’re scanning for positives, instead of scanning for threats. It’s the fastest way of teaching optimism. This works better if you’re scanning for new things and you’re very specific. So if you say, “I’m grateful for my son,” it doesn’t work as well. But if you say, “I’m grateful for my son because he hugged me today, which means I’m loved regardless,” that actually gets the brain stuck in a new pattern of optimism.

## **3. Re-live a positive experience**

For two minutes or more a day, think of one positive experience that has occurred either during the past 24 hours or some other time in your life. Remember as much detail of the experience as you can. Let your brain activate the feelings you had when the event happened. Remember a fun day spent with friends, a good movie, or an activity you enjoyed. Remember a positive personal experience with another person. If you have time journal your memory in as much detail as possible. It works because the brain can’t tell the difference between visualization and actual experience. So you’ve just re-created the most meaningful experience as if it were happening again.

## **4. Sharing the “good stuff”**

“Sharing is caring”. A boost in positive mood, not only for ourselves but for others, happens whenever we share good things that have happened for us. Make a habit of calling to mind good things that have happened during the day or week and share them with someone.

## **5. Conscious acts of kindness**

This habit seems to be the most powerful activity we can practice to maintain our sense of purpose and well being. Make a conscious effort to do something nice for someone for no reason other than to help. You might start by writing a two-minute positive email or text praising or thanking one person you know. And do it for a different person each day. You might be surprised how a simple act of kindness can turn around the day for both you and the kindness recipient.

## **6. Exercise**

Do at least 15 minutes of cardiovascular exercise a day. The positive effects of exercise are astounding. Physically active people have increased energy, superior immune systems, and a frequent sense of accomplishment.

## 7. Breathe

Stop everything you are doing for two minutes a day. Go from multitasking to simply watching your breath go in and out. This improves levels of happiness and drops your stress levels. And it takes only two minutes!

## 8. Practice meditation

Research has linked meditation with reduced anxiety and more positive emotions. Those who meditate regularly may even permanently restructure their brains to create sustained happiness. Go to the website [www.marc.ucla.edu](http://www.marc.ucla.edu) and listen to their free guided meditations.

*Headspace* is a digital service that provides guided meditation sessions and mindfulness training. Its content can be accessed online, or via their mobile apps. In April 2016, Headspace claimed to have over 6 million people using the app. Go to [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com). Their sessions are simple and wonderful!

## 9. Practice mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness is a healthy useful expansion of breathing and meditation. For helpful information and instructions go to [www.mindful.org/five-steps](http://www.mindful.org/five-steps).

## 10. Listen to music

Listen to your favorite genre of music for at least 10 minutes everyday, or if possible, longer. Music is a healing form of nature that releases endorphins to the brain and causes a decrease of stress and replaces it with happiness. Music works not only one part of the brain, but multiple parts. The simultaneous left and right brain action maximizes learning and memory.

## 11. Recall three things that went well today.

Every evening before retiring recall three things that went well during the day. Take some time to know your reasons why you think those events went well. If you have a chance, share them with someone. This practice is close to sharing good things that have happened, but a bit different. These are longer experiences that brought a sense of fulfillment or accomplishment.

## 12. Personal spiritual practice

Scientists have discovered that those who practice a religious faith report less depression and more positive emotion. "Survey after survey across North America and Europe reveals that religious people more often than non-religious people report being happy and satisfied with life." (David Myers) Whether your personal spiritual practice is connected with a religion or is a more private, personal path, some relationship with the Divine or a Higher Power can add to the experience of happiness, personal growth and flourishing. You are encouraged to add your own personal spiritual practices to the practices suggested above.

### **Learn and apply your character strengths.**

Go to the website [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org) and take the survey that is offered free of charge. Use the tools and aids offered on the website to learn clearly what your signature strengths are and how to honor them and move in them.

This activity stands alone as a life giving practice of positive psychology. Learn to practice character strengths separate from the daily activities suggested above. Character research shows that knowing and applying our unique character strengths give us a pathway to the experiences of positive emotion, engagement, healthy relationships, meaning and accomplishment in our daily lives. Developing your character strengths can have a significant impact on quality of life.

## PERMA

There are many ways to experience flourishing and more lasting happiness. Most of us think we know what well being and thriving are, but what are the actual elements that promote these experiences for each of us? Martin Seligman's theoretical model (PERMA) helps us understand these elements and what we can do to maximize each element to reach a life full of well being.

Seligman's PERMA model:

P – Positive Emotion

E – Engagement

R – Relationships

M – Meaning

A – Accomplishments

The PERMA model was designed by Martin Seligman with five core elements of psychological well-being and flourishing. Seligman believes that these five elements can help people reach a life of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning. This model can also be applied to institutions to develop programs to help people develop new cognitive and emotional tools.

For more information about PERMA see:

[www.positivepsychologyprogram.com/perma-model/](http://www.positivepsychologyprogram.com/perma-model/)

The website [www.jackmcginnis.com](http://www.jackmcginnis.com) contains personal insights and approaches to positive psychology, links to references about positive psychology, in addition to original songs and poetry and *"Jack's Only Blog"*.