

## Coda to 'It is possible to be happier'

Last month my [post](#) titled 'It is possible to be happier, but not for the reasons you may think' generated a good deal of interest. So much so in fact that I searched for more practical guidance on what you can do to be happier.

Here's some key things we've learning about happiness through science, courtesy of [Mindful](#) newsletter columnist [Stephany Tlalka](#) (whose helpful synopsis of current research I quote and gratefully acknowledge).

Expressing **gratitude** is the first way to be happier. **Science** shows expressing gratitude increases your happiness, and protects you from stress, negativity, anxiety, and depression. There are times when a single incident throws out your entire day and as a result you miss some of the enjoyable parts of the day. Being aware that your mind tends to hold on to the negative, you can consciously focus on the positive parts of your day. Keeping a 'gratitude journal' in which you write down five things you feel grateful for every day helps focus your mind. Keep your journal simple and short – and see how you benefit within weeks.



**Being of service** to others, even when feeling frazzled by too much to do and stretched for time, boosts your own sense of well-being. It's been shown that compassion is a key to happiness because **social connection is a major predictor of health**. For example, low social connection is worse than smoking and high blood pressure for you. When connection with others is present, it boosts mental and physical wellbeing. Research shows that when you smile you feel better, reduce your own stress, and also help others lift their spirits. Did you know your smile activates the smile muscles in others?

Idle **play** introduces an entirely different dimension into your day. Studies have shown play can boost your creativity, help you think laterally, improve your health, and make you feel present for yourself – and others. Take time out to play. Play with your or someone else's children. Play like a child. Have a good laugh at something, every day. Blow bubbles. Run in the park. Chase a dog. Pet a cat. Play.

**Don't chase happiness**. By chasing happiness you may chase it away. Being fixated on what you want to see in your life and then obsessing when things don't go to plan often turns into a vicious cycle. In [new research studies](#) it's been shown that the more value you place on happiness, the less happy you may become. Happiness is driven by the frequency, not the intensity, of positive emotions. When we aim for intense positive emotions, we evaluate our experiences against a higher standard, which makes it easier to be disappointed. Sadness and negative feelings are not always to be avoided. Despair can be the consequence of trying to avoid it. Be gentle on yourself. Give yourself space and time to be happy.

Finally, **meditate**. Again research shows that if you truly want to be happy, meditation is a good way to achieve happiness. As the wise saying goes, "Don't sweat the small stuff"; don't let your buttons be pushed by everything that happens to you. Meditating creates a sense of calm and allows you to rise above the daily grind. [Stephany Tlalka](#) recommends trying [Elisha Goldstein's 10-minute guided meditation](#) video.

*This post was written by [Dr Margaret Beaton](#), a director of [Beaton Executive Coaching](#) and [Beaton Research + Consulting](#). You can also find Margaret on [LinkedIn](#).*