

Civilian Employee Assistance Program

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Positive Emotions Increase Life Satisfaction

Most everyone would prefer to experience positive emotions such as joy, interest, love, serenity, awe, amusement or pride rather than negative states such as fear, depression or anxiety. Simply put, positive emotions feel good. The latest research reports that they can also make you healthier and happier if you take the time to cultivate them.



THE 3 TO 1 POSITIVITY RATIO

If your life isn't quite how you'd like it to be, researchers studying human emotions report that you can start improving your life by increasing the ratio at which you experience positive to negative emotions (known as your positivity ratio). Scientists have even determined the "tipping point," or the minimum positivity ratio necessary for you to improve your life. That ratio is at least 3 to 1. For each negative emotional experience you endure, you need to experience at least three positive emotional experiences that lift you up.

A summary of positivity ratios from the book *Positivity* by Barbara Frederickson, Ph.D.:

- People who are flourishing report a positivity ratio of at least 3 to 1. This includes approximately 20 percent of the population.
- Those in the "normal" range report a positivity ratio of 2 to 1. According to Frederickson, these people feel like they're "just getting by" and comprise approximately 60 percent of the population.
- People who are depressed report a positivity ratio of 1 to 1, or lower.

THE BENEFITS OF POSITIVITY

Broaden and build. Barbara Frederickson, Ph.D., has been studying positive emotions for over 20 years. According to Frederickson, when we experience a positive emotion our thinking

expands (Negative emotions, on the other hand, narrow our thinking.). “We literally see more,” she says, “allowing us to face our problems with clear eyes, make creative connections and see more possible solutions for problems.” Frederickson has named this the “broaden effect.” Additionally, says Frederickson, as we make a habit of seeking out positive emotions we change and grow for the better. We discover and build new skills, new knowledge and new ways of being that allow us to live healthier and happier (the build effect). “Positivity presents an opportunity to step up to the next level of existence, to broaden your mind and build your best self,” says Frederickson.

Healthier and happier. According to current research, those who practice a steady diet of positive emotions:

- Report fewer aches and pains, headaches and other physical symptoms. They also have lower blood pressure, fewer colds and sleep better.
- Are better able to rebound from adversity and stress. Positive emotions create a calming effect in your body that can lower blood pressure, dissipate stress energy and lift your mood.
- Develop more positive and closer relationships with others. They tend to have more friends and a larger social network to rely on during crises.
- Become more optimistic, more resilient, less depressed and more satisfied with life. In a study tracking the outcomes of patients undergoing treatment for depression, the patients whose positivity ratios rose to 4 to 1 showed no signs of depressive symptoms and displayed optimal functioning.



HOW TO INCREASE YOUR POSITIVITY RATIO

1. Track your positivity ratio. Take the “Positivity Self Test” online at PositivityRatio.com. Track your positivity ratio nightly for two weeks to see what your average is. Tracking helps you become more mindful of your sources of positive emotions and the triggers for your negative ones. The self test is also available in the book *Positivity*, by Frederickson.

2. Increasing your positive emotions. Some practical ways to increase the frequency of positive emotions in daily life include:

- Focus more on the present moment. Frederickson says that most moments are positive and that we miss many opportunities for positive emotions by thinking too much about the past or worrying about the future.
- Find positive meaning more frequently in your daily life.
- Savor the good things in your life and the good things that happen to you. Keep a daily list of the things you are thankful for.
- Practice altruistic behaviors and small acts of kindness.
- Focus on your personal strengths and follow your passions. Give yourself permission to play and find activities that uniquely engage you.

- Connect with others. Scientists have documented that people gain more positivity by being with others than by being alone.
- Spend more time outdoors and/or in nature. According to a recent study, people who spent twenty or more minutes outside when the weather was nice boosted their positive emotions.
- Learn and practice meditation. According to Frederickson, meditation opens your mind and an open mind breeds positivity.

3. Decreasing your negativity. At times, negative emotions are appropriate and can serve useful functions. The key is to eliminate negativity that is neither helpful nor healthy. The following suggestions can help:

- **Dispute negative thinking.** Ask yourself: What are the facts of my situation? What negative thoughts and beliefs got triggered and how did they make me feel? How do those thoughts and beliefs compare to reality? By examining the facts you can bring a calm and rational perspective to the picture. Rather than suppressing negativity or attempting to push negativity out of your mind, you are simply checking it against reality and often will find it is not as bad as you first thought.
- **Stop ruminating.** Don't keep going over and over your negative thoughts and feelings. Doing so only gets you stuck in a rut and continues to fan the flames of your negativity. Learn to recognize when you are ruminating on negative thoughts and then stop it by finding a healthy activity to distract you and break the cycle. Go for a walk or jog, do yoga, read a book, or anything that fully absorbs you and takes your mind off of your negative feelings.
- **Avoid the circumstances that trigger your negativity.** Examine your typical daily routine and ask yourself which circumstances create the most negativity. Then, do whatever you possibly can to eliminate or diffuse the situation. Do certain people bring you down? Avoid them. Look for positive solutions. You can't diffuse or eliminate everything, but the more you can eliminate, the higher your positivity ratio will rise.

Co-use of Alcohol and Caffeine Can Raise Risks from Intoxication

If you drink, you should know that coffee won't sober you up if you've had too much to drink. Instead, a cup of coffee may make it harder for you to realize that you're drunk. This, according to a study reported in the December 2009 journal *Behavioral Neuroscience*.

The myth about coffee's sobering powers is particularly important to debunk, said the researchers, because the co-use of caffeine and alcohol can actually lead to poor decisions with disastrous outcomes. People who have consumed only alcohol, who feel tired and intoxicated, may be more likely to acknowledge that they are drunk. Conversely, people who have consumed both alcohol and caffeine may feel awake and competent enough to handle potentially harmful situations, such as driving while intoxicated or placing themselves in dangerous social situations.

In recent years, alcohol-energy drink combinations have skyrocketed in popularity. The study authors noted evidence that these drinks produce deficits in general cognitive ability and raise the odds of alcohol-related problems such as drunken-driving citations, sexual misconduct, and needing medical assistance.



TIPS FOR DRINKING WISELY (OR NOT AT ALL)

- **Develop a responsible attitude toward drinking.** This basically means not becoming drunk. Consider the rights of those who choose to abstain. You don't need to drink in order to have a good time, even though it has become an accepted part of socializing in this country. If you don't want to drink, ask for a non-alcoholic beverage. You can be just as sociable with a ginger ale in your hand.
- **Measure your drinks.** Five ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1-1/2 ounces of spirits is the maximum that a 160-pound man should consume in an hour.
- **Know your limit when you drink.** If you drink slowly (instead of gulping), you won't get drunk as quickly. If your drink somehow vanishes before an hour is up, switch to juice or a soft drink. Don't accept unfamiliar drinks. They may contain more alcohol than you are used to drinking.
- **Never drink on an empty stomach.** When drinking, eat starches, proteins, or fats to keep alcohol from being absorbed too quickly.
- **Never take drugs (even non-prescription ones) in combination with drinking.** Alcohol can negate the action of some drugs, can make you sick when combined with others, and can be fatal (for example when you combine alcohol with too many sleeping pills).
- **Never drive after you've been drinking.** If you must drive, wait at least an hour before driving for each drink you've had (equivalent to one beer or one ounce of whiskey).

How to Avoid Holiday Debt

According to financial experts, the average American family racks up more debt during the holidays than in any other season. Think you'll pay off all of those holiday credit card charges by February? Think again. Financial experts say it takes most people six to 18 months to pay off their holiday credit card bills.



It seems to be especially hard for some people not to overspend during the holidays because of an emotional need to express love, appreciation and friendship. Below are strategies and spending tips to help you eliminate overspending and prevent a financial “holiday hangover.” Here’s what to do:

- 1. Set a budget and do not exceed it.** Set an overall budget for all holiday spending and do not exceed it, under any circumstances. This is the amount you can afford to spend on the holidays, without going into debt.
- 2. Create a written spending plan.** Create a written plan for holiday spending and gift giving a month or two in advance of the holidays. Be sure to include all holiday spending including gifts, wrapping paper, cards, party supplies, wardrobe, food, etc. Estimate the cost of each planned expenditure. If the total exceeds your allocated budget, delete, revise or rethink your projected purchases until the budget covers all expenditures. Finalize a written shopping list of projected holiday expenditures.
- 3. Bring your shopping list.** Enter a store only when you have your shopping list and the total amount you plan to spend. Review your spending at the end of each shopping day. If you overspend in one area, deduct that amount from another area you had planned to spend money on.
- 4. Treat credit card purchases as part of your total budget.** Your goal this year is to avoid holiday debt, so any purchases made by credit card must be subtracted from your budget, just as you would account for a check or cash purchase.
- 5. Plan ahead for next year.** Open a holiday savings account in January and save for holiday spending year ‘round. Save a specific amount of cash each month throughout the year. You’ll have a great head start on your holiday budget.

For Your Information

JUMP START YOUR WORK WEEK

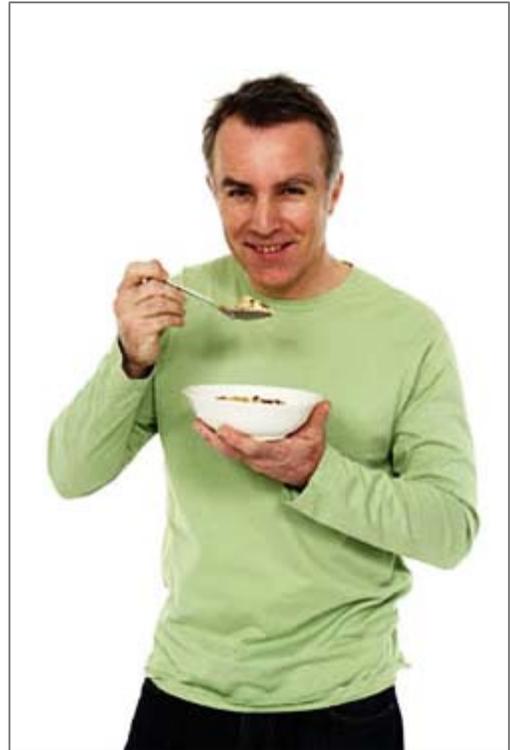
To help get your work week off to a good start, get up earlier on Monday morning and have a good breakfast. Arrive to work earlier. The head start will help you feel more in charge of your workday.

BETTER COMMUNICATION FOR COUPLES

To improve communication with your partner, describe your feelings. Don't assume your partner knows your needs, feelings or opinions without telling him or her. To express yourself clearly use "feeling" words like "sad," "happy," "excited," "angry," etc.

MOVE YOUR BODY

Exercise for at least 30 minutes four to five days per week. Exercise isn't just good for your body; it's also good for your mind. Studies show that regular physical activity increases happiness and self-esteem, reduces anxiety and stress, and can even lift symptoms of depression.



Employee Assistance Program Services

PROVIDED BY YOUR EMPLOYER FOR YOU AND YOUR DEPENDENTS

Your Employee Assistance Program is a prepaid and confidential program designed to help employees and their dependents resolve problems which may be interfering with their personal, work or home life. EAP Consultants offers help for marital and family issues, substance abuse, job concerns, emotional problems, life adjustments, legal issues, financial matters, and elder care and child care referrals.

If you're experiencing problems which are causing concern, you and your EAP Counselor can work as a team to find solutions.

For assistance, call EAP Consultants at: **800-869-0276** or request services by secure e-mail on the Member Access page of our website at <http://www.eapconsultants.com/>.