

## Enhancing Your Shot at Happiness

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Rates of depression, anxiety and stress have significantly risen over the last 50 years. At some point most people will exhibit clinical signs of depression or undue anxiety. We can tip the odds in our favor with lifestyle changes to prevent developing a diagnosable condition.

Methods of self-empowered lifestyle changes include:

- Exercise
- Meditation
- Dietary changes
- Mindfulness
- Positive thinking
- Sleep

**Exercise** is the most beneficial method of self-directed treatment for mental health. It enhances serotonin, dopamine, endorphins, and brain derived neurotrophic factors, reduces inflammation, and:

- Sharpens memory
- Increases energy
- Increases social engagement
- Improves self confidence
- Distracts from worries and concerns
- Improves physical illness outcome

Typically, 30 minutes, 5 times a week, of moderate exercise is optimal, but any amount is helpful.

**Meditation**, an ancient practice, tames the mind to channel focus and energy to the task at hand. Clearly beneficial for physical, mental and emotional health. A few recommendations include:

- Commit to daily practice in a comfortable position
- Choose a technique that suits you- prayer, visualization, affirmation, mindfulness
- Practice relaxed breathing while meditating

**Dietary Lifestyle** recommendations are constantly changing, but for brain health guidelines exist based on the following recommendations:

- Lean protein
- Lots of fruits and vegetables
- Limited refined carbohydrates
- Reduce or eliminate fried foods and opt for plant based fats

**Mindfulness** is using a variety of techniques to reduce the rapid stream of thoughts that run through our minds. The benefits are limitless to ourselves, our health and our relationships. Multiple practices exist, here are a few examples:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Music
- Focusing on the **now** and resisting other thoughts- really enjoy what you are presently doing

**Positive thinking** is essential for happiness. We all have to cultivate it...it is not innate. To help with this endeavor:

- Take responsibility to change
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Reframe problems to challenges
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Read positive literature

Last but not least is the elusive subject of **sleep**. Nearly all adults require 7-9 hours of sleep. Good sleep practices include:

- Sleep in a dark, cool room
- Avoid caffeine (6 hours), alcohol (2 hours) and electronics (1hour) before bed
- Awake and go to bed at the same time
- Don't nap
- Keep the bedroom for sleep only

Achieving peace and happiness is possible, even in today's complicated world and requires motivation for change. Once begun, positive change is often rapid. Start today and use these guidelines to enact a healthier and happier life.