

Your Mental Health

THE POWER OF JOY

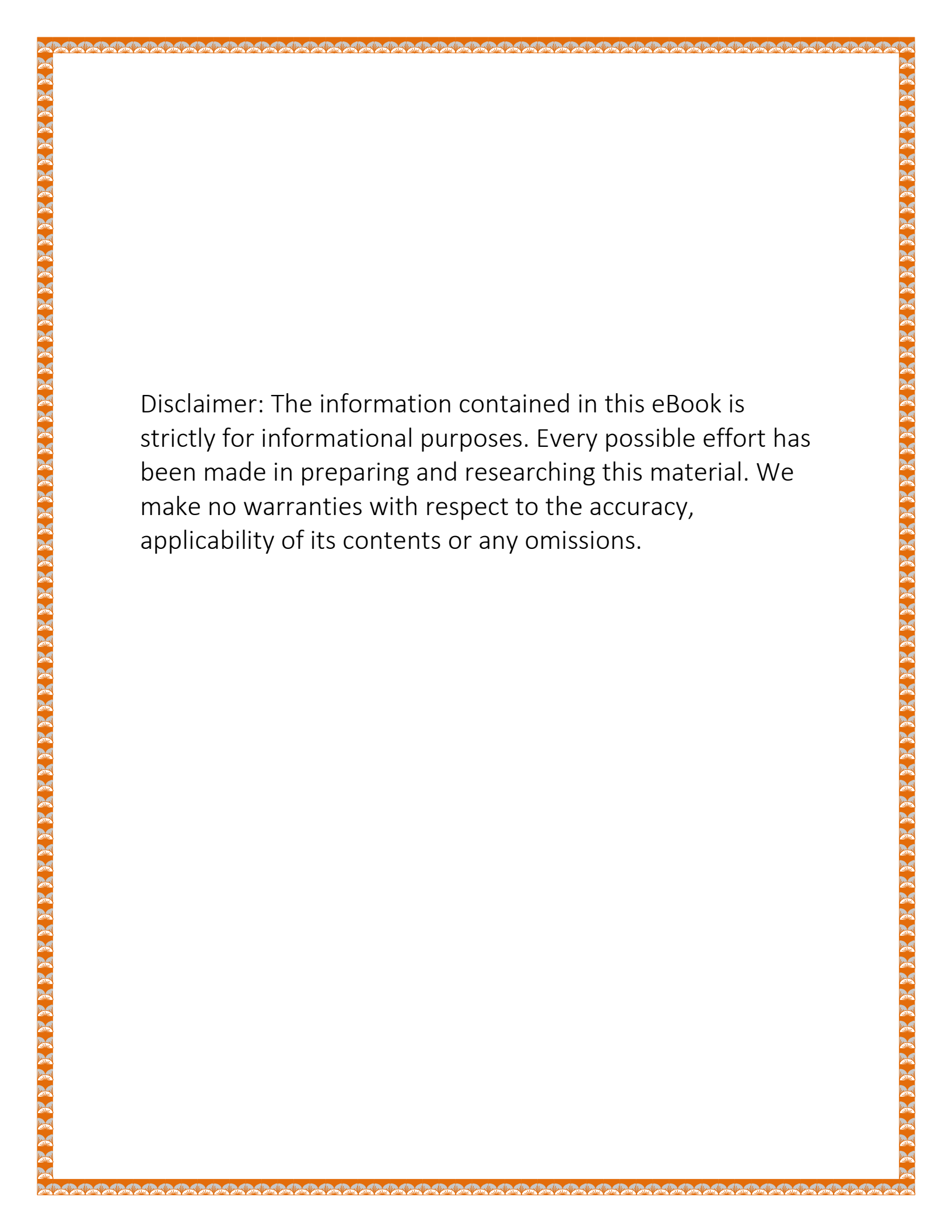
IN TIMES OF FEAR, HARDSHIP AND CHAOS

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.



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Introduction

For an extremely large number of individuals, there is a daily struggle taking place inside the mind. Mental health, although starting to receive more attention and recognition, is still commonly disregarded in our society.

While those who struggle with mental health can be facing a fairly numerous array of issues that fall under this umbrella, finding helpful information, or even encouragement for that matter, without a judgmental undertone can be difficult.

Anyone dealing with mental health issues can tell you that trying to maintain a healthy internal environment is challenging even in the best of times when life outside the mind is relatively free of major problems and the sun is shining brightly.



With that being said, it is easy to understand that this same challenge during periods of fear, hardship and chaos can quickly become a hellacious struggle. When there is no balance of positive and negative outside the mind versus inside, both sides being negative, a person can find themselves in a very dark place.

The focus of this discussion will be to offer up a few simple pieces of information that are purely intended to describe a few thoughts about how to find joy during bad times, even when mental health issues are already a daily struggle.

Even if you have heard the information before, hopefully they might be discussed below in a different manner that provides a spark in your mind.

Thoughts Become Things

The concept of this idea is one that is often grossly misrepresented. Furthermore, it is another example of an extremely powerful idea that is repeated so often in the wrong context that it has lost much of its true meaning.

The idea that what you repeated think about and the internal dialogue that you maintain within your mind often comes to fruition in real life is not some Jedi mind trick or psychic ability that



belongs to only pseudoscience. While there are plenty of “gurus” out there that claim to have the ability to manifest things out of thin air, the real meaning of this notion is important to understand.

The reason that your internal dialogue and the things that you repeatedly think about seem to actually come true is not

some supernatural occurrence. When we have a specific idea or perspective on something, especially the way we view our self-worth and the world around us, every action that we take in our day-to-day life becomes a subconscious reflection of these ideas. For example, if you tell yourself that today is going to be a bad day, dreading the things you need to complete, you will absolutely approach each event with a predetermined outcome in your mind.

For individuals that struggle with mental health each and every day, the simple thought of how a mental health issue will negatively affect life can be all that it takes to turn even the best days into a gloomy one. This becomes especially true during periods of life that are truly difficult or hard. This is why your internal dialogue must be one that looks for the silver lining regardless of your external situation.

Whatever your current situation looks like, the way life affects you can absolutely be decided by your outlook. Although this can be difficult, making a conscious decision to remain positive and

optimistic is the first step to improving your mental health. This is not something that can be achieved without a significant amount of practice and trial and error. As a matter of fact, obtaining this state of mind may involve the concept of fake it till you make it. For example, you may have to allow yourself to think exceptionally positive thoughts to an almost delusional extent at first.

With enough effort, you will find that by willing your mind to find the best in every situation, the situations themselves actually begin to shift in your favor. Make no mistake, there are some situations that are truly so bad and undesirable that no amount of mental encouragement will change them.

This is part of life and what it means to be a human being. However, many situations that we perceive as negative from square one are not truly as bad as we make them out to be. You may have heard this before, but life is far less about what actually happens to you than the manner in which you react to it.

As a human being, you have an ability that is unavailable to every other living thing. This is the ability to make conscious decisions about your circumstances. Unlike other animals that simply react to a stimulus in a preprogrammed way, you can literally decide how to feel about your environment.

Wherever you find yourself in life, make sure that the narratives you tell yourself and your outlook going into each day is one that aligns with positivity and happiness. It makes no sense to try to avoid hard times and dark days, they are going to happen. However, your thoughts have a direct influence on whether or not you emerge on the other end, bitter or better.

Perspective Is Everything

More often than not, situations that we consider to be hopeless or terrible are often exacerbated due to a lack of perspective of the situation as a whole. When we allow ourselves to see our individual lives through a sort of tunnel vision, we are unable to compare the things that happen to us to the situations being encountered by other people all around us.

While you may have heard the excuse, “it could always be worse,” so many times that you are sick of hearing it, there is a lot of merit to this idea. For most people, the horrible conditions that countless human beings are faced with on a daily basis are completely foreign.

Even on our darkest days, most of us are still blessed with circumstances someone else would dream about. The purpose of this reminder is in no way intended to downplay anything you may be going through.



Your situation and happiness are absolutely important, and we are all faced with difficult situations and low spots along the path of life. Realizing that other human beings are dealing with worse things can sometimes be the exact shift of perspective required to assume a more positive outlook on our own tribulations.

Simply realizing the state of others around the world is a great way to improve your mental state pertaining to your own times of chaos and worry, however, there is an even better way to visualize this idea.

As strange as it may seem, helping less fortunate people in your immediate environment is a fantastic perspective shift for anyone struggling with a tough problem. A paradox that we are all

susceptible to is the ability to distance ourselves from problems and suffering going on all over the world simply because these things are not occurring in our close proximity.

On the other hand, there are very likely people you unknowingly come into contact with on a routine basis that are struggling far more than you seem to be. For example, take a visit to your local homeless shelter, food pantry or adoption agency. Here you will find plenty of examples of situations that minimize the severity of your own.

While simply becoming aware of these struggles in your community is sure to shift your perspective, lending a hand can be just as beneficial to your own mental state as those that you assist. There is something about helping other people that fills the human spirit with a rush of positive emotions.

This feeling is not describing some bragging right or virtue signaling that, unfortunately, many boast about when they help out with these types of things. Rather, there is a genuine, intrinsic sense of happiness that is available to those who put aside their own worries and struggles in order to offer their time to another person'

To conclude this idea, just realize that the perspective with which you view your own struggles, mentally or externally, is one of the biggest factors in determining how you cope with them. Resist the natural urge to get so caught up in your problems that you put on blinders to the issues and challenges imposed on so many other people.

Control What You Can Control

When facing any sort of problem or source of worry, we are often times overcome with a sense of helplessness and discouragement. More often than not, this occurs because we realize that many of the factors being described are out of our control. We then take on the notion that, because we cannot control everything going on, we probably can't control any part of the situation at all.

This thought process is an extremely detrimental progression when it comes to maintaining an optimistic mental state. The truth is you are only a single human being existing in a vast universe of circumstances and variables.

Therefore, you are absolutely correct to assume that many things are out of your control. The turning point occurs when you realize that some things are. The next breakthrough happens when you gain the ability to interpret a difficult situation and then separate the two.

One of the biggest confidence boosts that you can receive in a tough situation is the feeling that you are actively taking steps to resolve the issue. This is why knowing what parts of the issue as a whole are within your control is so crucial. When you are able to discern exactly what these variables are, take action.

While this may not completely solve your issue or make it vanish right before your eyes, it will accomplish several beneficial things. First and foremost, it will begin to eliminate the victim mindset that we often assume when faced with big problems. Instead of cowering in a corner and allowing our circumstances to control us, we are able to stand up for ourselves.

Furthermore, by taking even some form of action towards resolution, we minimize the overarching problem to a certain extent. Both of these benefits combine in such a way that we are able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. When you are able to visualize an end to your issue, you may very well find that the lists of things you are able to change is more expansive than you first assumed.

Whatever is posing a threat to your mental state of being; it is critical that you break the problem down into manageable components. Becoming filled with a sense of gloom and doom, feeling hopeless to your circumstances will accomplish nothing but to exacerbate the issue. Similarly, realizing that you are not in control of all of the factors in your life can provide an enormous sense of peace and resolution.

Trying to carry the weight of the world, the world as you see it, on your shoulders is a burden too great for even the strongest people. However, taking accountability for certain aspects of your burden is just as important. If you truly want to improve your situation, you must avoid giving into the victim mentality at all costs. In case you were unaware, life can be a cruel



opponent at times. Just because you have fallen down, life will not hesitate to do everything in its power to keep you there.

It is up to you to stand up and realize that you are far too capable and competent to allow yourself to become a lost cause. Regardless of how highly or lowly you view yourself or what abilities you may or may not have, you are completely strong enough to take action against the things in your life that are bringing you down.

Will this courage and bravery always result in a breakthrough moment that elevates you above the issue? It certainly will not. However, it will place you in a position of authority over many of the smaller issues that you used to feel vulnerable to.

Make Your Personal Habits A Place Of Refuge

You may be at a place in your life where everything around you is completely chaotic. Our world today seems to be at a constant breaking point, with controversy and unprecedented change happening at an all too common rate. During these times you must have some mechanism for balancing out the turmoil and confusion.

Whether you consider yourself an organized person or not, we all need some form of structure in our lives. Free spirited or not, there must be things in our day-to-day routine that are predictable and reliable. Without some semblance of order, your mental state will quickly become one of anxiety and stress.



While this is true for people in general, those who find that their mental health is already in a fragile state need structure even more so. Given that our world today is as unpredictable as previously mentioned, what can you possibly cling to in this raging sea of confusion? The answer lies in your personal habits and routines.

No matter what is going on externally, there can always be a sense of comfort found in the way you spend your time. These do not even have to be big things such as a job or some role you play in your community. On the contrary, the most miniscule parts of your day can play this role.

Think about the things you do upon waking up every morning, from showering, making a pot of coffee, to the breakfast you eat on a routine basis. While these habits may seem unimportant, they are a great example of things that you can still depend on despite what is going on in the world around you.

Taking this idea, a step forward, there are even personal practices that can remain stable even when you must venture out into the crazy environment. Your drive to work everyday, listening to your favorite music, audiobook or podcast is safe from rapid change. The way you organize your desk or personal work environment is pretty much decided by you and you alone.

As you return home after a long day of whatever occupation you are involved in, your evening routine can provide another source of reliability. Whether this is preparing a nice meal, conversing with your loved ones or maybe going for a walk around the block, once again these habits are decided by you.

The point to be made here is that just because your outside environment has no regard for your sense of peace and shelter, there are little tidbits of your schedule that can serve to counteract the issue. Ironically, most of the things that are immune to outside influences are things that, when the world around you is peaceful and calm, are pretty much taken for granted.

Let's face it, almost nobody finds peace in taking a shower and getting ready for work in the morning. If you will notice, however, you will hold these things in a much higher regard when they become the only things you can count on. The trick here is to recognize the aspects of your life that you are in almost complete control over.

When you identify these habits, allow yourself to lean on them when you need to. The little things that you do are what make you unique as a human being. Whatever you do for a living or whatever hobbies you enjoy, there are guaranteed to be a huge number of people who do the same things.

However, you can be assured that nobody else gets dressed exactly the way you do. The things you do in the car when you are driving by yourself are not being done in the exact same way by anyone else.

Do your mental health of favor and find refuge in the unique aspects of your life. While everything around you will perpetually change and sneak up on you, these things never will.

Some Storms Should Not Be Weathered Alone

Whether the problem you are experiencing right now is a personal struggle that is taking place inside your own mind or personal life or you are subjected to a society-wide issue, understand that there are some things that you are not meant to deal with by yourself. Dealing with a big



problem is a task that can be daunting enough on its own, going at it alone almost impossible.

As human beings, we are inherently social creatures that are made to enjoy fellowship and find safety with one another. This aspect of who we are has played a vital role in our survival as a species.

Just because we are not required to depend on groups for survival as frequently as our ancestors, we still have a longing to fit in and relate to one another. Solitude is no way to go about life in general, especially in times of hardship.

If you are going through a personal issue, the people in your life who are closest to you are a lifeline. These people are the ones who know you best, love you and have your best interests at heart. While it would make sense to confide in these individuals, there are several common reasons why we often fail to do so.

Often times, our ego can get in the way. Many people perceive opening up to someone else about a problem as a sign of weakness. This is especially true in today's world, with social media serving as a snapshot of peoples lives within which they only show others the good times, the things they want them to see. Nobody is posting their marriage problems or financial hardships on their profiles for the world to see.

Another reason people avoid sharing their personal issues with their inner circles is the fear of dragging another person in to their own problems. Out of love and respect for these people, they assume that by talking to them about what is bothering them personally, the other individual will experience the same issue to some degree.

Both of these reasons can strongly interfere with how effectively you cope with a personal struggle. It is important to realize that the people who are closest to you, the ones that truly love you, are here for exactly these types of situations.

You should never let something that is bothering you on a deep level fester within your mind just because you are too prideful to open up or for the sake of protecting those you care about. The deepest and most meaningful relationships are literally grounded in the fact that personal issues and secret information can be shared in a way that is confidential and without judgment.

When it comes to some source of chaos or problem that affects your community or even world as a whole, facing the source of the issue with other people is also a great way to find strength and peace.

Although it is somewhat unfortunate, people come together in a far more unified and uniform way during terrible times than in times of normalcy. Look at the United States for example. When America has been at war, or shortly after the attacks of 9/11, people of all walks of life banded together in the name of a cause.

If the problem you are facing is large enough to affect your society as a whole, there is peace to be found knowing that other people understand exactly what you are going through. While it is true that different people have different mechanisms for dealing with and processing these types of situations, there is usually a general feeling that is universal amongst the group.

When you are feeling troubled, join together with your community to deal with the overarching issue. The exact way in which you can accomplish this looks different depending on the actual problem, but in these sort of occurrences there will always be groups and projects formed in which people from all walks of life can freely come together to make a difference.

No matter how personal or external the threat to your mental health is, you must not attempt to endure it alone. Admitting your own vulnerability and personal limitations in order to find strength in numbers is how humans have dealt with controversy since the beginning of time. The old saying, “go faster by yourself, go further together,” is a sound piece of advice to keep in mind when dealing with a problem.

5 Ways to Find More Joy in Your Life - Even Now in Times of Fear and Chaos

These days, the world often seems to be a terrible place, with one disaster happening after another. In the last few months, the world has experienced a pandemic, massive protests, and never-ending news stories about politics, sickness, and death. Yet opportunities for more joy in your life do exist. How do you find more joy in your life, even now in times of fear and chaos?

According to psychologists and researchers, there are five simple ways to help you find more joy in your life. These five ways work, no matter what state the world is in right now. Successfully finding more joy in your life depends on what state your mindset is in, not on what is happening in the world.

1. Don't Wait to Be Happy

"There is no time like the present." - Proverb

If you wait for something to happen to make you happy, you will spend your life waiting, not finding joy. When you delay joy for a future event, you miss countless opportunities for joy every day. Finding more joy means living in the present and appreciating the good you see all around you.

Even amid global fear and chaos, there are opportunities for joy in your daily life. Pay attention to the stories of kindness people show, like neighborhood sing-alongs, the support shown to healthcare workers, and of people coming together to support one another. Joy is available, so stop waiting for it to find you and look for it every day.

1. Practice Gratitude

"It's not happiness that brings us gratitude. It's gratitude that brings us happiness." - Anonymous

When you practice gratitude, the world becomes a much more joyful place. Even when things are difficult and seem out of control, gratitude helps you keep a positive mindset. Being grateful for what you have improves your resilience against obstacles in life.

Practicing gratitude includes being thankful for both the good and bad things in your life. While it's easier to be grateful when something good happens, you can be grateful for bad things, too, because they are opportunities to remind yourself of what you have accomplished and what you can do in the future. Bad things that happen in the world allow you to appreciate what you do have and find ways to learn and grow to overcome obstacles.

2. Self-Care

"The most important relationship is the one you have with yourself." - Diane von Furstenberg

Don't let what happens in the world keep you from taking care of yourself. Your self-esteem and mindset depend on self-care. Simple pleasures, quiet moments, hobbies, and taking care of your health are ways to practice self-care, improve your emotional strength, and find more joy in your life.

3. Surround Yourself with Positive People

"Surround yourself with positive people and you'll be a positive person." - Kellie Pickler

Who you spend time with affects how you see yourself and how you see the world. By surrounding yourself with positive people, you boost your positive feelings about life. Positive people help keep you on track, support you, and help you practice gratitude.

Turn off the TV and internet news. Read an inspiring book or watch a feel-good movie. Find friends who support you and positively look at life. Keeping negativity out of your life moves you away from anxiety and fear and moves you toward joy.

4. Stop Worrying

"You can destroy your now by worrying about tomorrow." - Janis Joplin

Most of what people worry about never happens. Worry comes from fears inside your mind about what could happen, not about what will happen. Worry often involves being upset about the worst-case scenario, which rarely happens.

And even if something terrible does happen in the future, worrying won't stop or change it. Worry focuses your attention on negative outcomes, not on the opportunities for joy in your life. You will find more joy when you stop worrying about the chaos in the world and focus on the goodness in your life.

Find more joy in your life by focusing on the good that surrounds you. No matter what is happening in the world, your happiness and joy depend on having a positive outlook and mindset.

An Anatomy Of Joy And How To Find More In Your Life

How much time have you spent considering joy? It's an emotion that many of us experience fleetingly, but rarely do we ever consider how we could contribute to a greater sense of joy.

While many people believe happiness can be found in material wealth or possessions, climbing the career ladder, or building a family, most people don't realize joy is an internal process.

As we continue, I'd like you to consider a few questions.

- Where does joy live?
- How do you know you're experiencing joy authentically?
- What makes you open to joy?
- Do you feel more joyful at different times of the year?
- Is your joy external or internal?
- How can you find joy more consistently?

If you ask a room of 100 people what you think about joy, you will get a diverse response. There will likely be a common thread in those responses, however, it's a personal connection. Your personal connection may be to nature, loved ones, life, or a god. We often associate joy as coming via a conduit. Joy is a natural part of the human experience when you aim to personally connect with every moment.

Engage In Pleasure

There are a variety of ways in which you can seek joy, many of them revolve around self-care. The reality of the situation is that while external situations can bring fleeting joy, internal joy is lasting. You should seek out activities that are fun! They don't have to be goal-oriented, there's doesn't need to be a point, do it because it feels fun.

It's also important that you deal with any sadness which might be blocking your joy. Joy is impossible when you are sad. If you are experiencing sadness, then you should find somewhere quiet and let yourself process that sadness. If you need to cry, do it. If you need to be mad, do it! You can acknowledge loss, hurt, pain, and sadness. Don't get caught up in the negative inner thoughts you're having. Experience the sadness, process it, and shake it off.

A change is as good as a rest, or so they say, but rest is important. Don't overlook regular breaks to nurture, refresh, reflect, and reenergize. Escape from the chaos of your day and put your feet up. Do activities that bring you joy because they are truly acts of self-care, whether it's a nap, hot bath, or a massage.

Laughter feels amazing so it shouldn't surprise you that laughing more often will bring you more joy. Go out of your way to have a good giggle.

Love also brings joy, but it isn't about finding a partner who will love you unconditionally. Rather, it's learning to love yourself unconditionally and extending that to the people in your life. You've probably heard people say that no one else will love you until you find a way to love yourself.

Well, the only way to find unconditional love from others is to first tap into your well of unconditional love. Think about how you apply conditions to your affections. Think about how you operate with others and whether that is behavior that will bring you joy or is something stifling your joy.

The biggest mistake you can make about joy is believing that happiness finds you. I want to correct you on that – happiness and joy are active choices you make. However, your choices can

be influenced by your environment, which is why you must surround yourself with the most positive people you know. You choose joy and you choose your influences, too.

Can Joy Help Protect Your Immune System

Is Worry Making You Sick?

People are always using the phrase that you are going to worry yourself sick. There really is a connection. Worry and anxiety go hand in hand. Anxiety is a response to a stressful situation. It can cause a wide range of physical symptoms along with physiological issues. When you feel anxious your heart rate and breathing rate increase. You may experience nausea and upset stomach.

Studies have shown worry and stress can cause changes in the brain. It doesn't cause damage, but it does increase the risk of mental illness such as depression and anxiety. Anxiety and stress have also shown to make an individual's body weaker and have shown to shorten their lifespan. The opposite is also the case. The more joy you have the less anxious you will feel. Studies have shown that happiness and joy boost the immune response. Happier people are less prone to sickness. Maybe laughter is the best medicine.

Ways to Enhance Joy in Our Lives

It is easy for others to say just relax or just be happy and everything will be alright. Realistically that is just naive. But there are studies that do show staying calm and relaxed improves the immune response. One way to relax is by inducing a relaxed state. This can be done with meditation or even hypnosis. This relaxed state helps reduce physical symptoms caused by stress.

Maintaining close relationships is another way to enhance joy. A healthy marriage or friendship has been shown to enhance good health as compared to a strained relationship that causes negative health consequences.

Other examples are holding hands with someone, petting a pet, music, and massage to name a few. What you are ideally looking for are ways to reduce stress and help cultivate relaxation. This will help enhance joy and happiness at the same time giving your immune system a boost.

Joy Can Help the Healing Process

Have you ever noticed when some people are happy or joyful their face gets flushed? This increase in happiness produces and enhances circulation of the blood in the body. This increase in circulation provides the body with more blood flow. For example, if you have an infection within your body the increase in blood flow allows more blood to reach the areas that contain the infection. With more blood available the infection will have more nutrients needed for the healing process.

Sometimes medications and antibiotics are needed for treating an infection. The increased blood flow will enable the needed amount of medication to reach the infected area, which will assist the healing process.

Positive Outlook for a Healthier Immune System

Having a positive attitude will improve all situations and areas in your life. A happier lifestyle will improve health as well. Emotions play an important role in regulating body systems that influence health. One of the major body systems influenced is the immune system. Happiness has a direct relation to your immune response.

Sadness or negativity also has a direct relationship as well. The more joyful you are the more reactive your immune system is to defend your body from illness. The more sadness or negativity the individual feels the less responsive the immune system will be.

People that are happier are more likely to take part in health-promoting behaviors that play an important role in keeping the immune system strong. These include a healthy diet and regular exercise.

And on the flip side, the more stressed or depressed an individual is the less likely they are to participate in healthy habits. One of the best defenses against stress, anxiety, and illness is a positive attitude.

How Joy Affects Your Mental Health

Nowadays everyone is concerned with their physical health. There is literature, books, videos, websites, classes, and apps on how to get your body physically fit. But you never hear about ways to improve your mental health. One way of improving your mental health is by adding more joy to your life. Joy is an emotion brought on by a life event.

We feel joy in a variety of ways such as tearfully, euphoric, and contentment to name a few. Internally we feel joy in our neurotransmitters, which are messenger cells that transmit signals between nerves and other cells. These neurotransmitters are responsible for processes and feelings in all aspects of the body from circulation to digestion.

Joy Decreases Stress

Joy can increase your ability to recover from stress, solve problems, think clearer, and fight disease. Laughing is a way we express joy. Laughing helps decrease pain, improve your heart and lungs, helps muscles relax, and can reduce anxiety. The positive feeling from joy can decrease stress hormones and support emotional strength.

Stress is not only disruptive on a psychological level it also causes biological changes in the body's blood pressure. Joy seems to decrease these effects and help us recover from them faster. Pain causes feelings of stress and stresses the body at the same time. Joy has been shown to decrease pain and relieve pain symptoms. So, if you are feeling stressed out or anxious incorporate more joy in your life.

Joy Boosts Mood

Joy is felt in our bodies because of the release of hormones in the brain. Those two hormones are dopamine and serotonin. These two chemicals are associated with happiness and joy. People with depression typically have low levels of these two hormones. Simple joyful activities such as going for a walk, petting a dog, kissing, and even forcing a smile, can help those hormones to do their job and improve your mood.

While we can't control our surroundings, we can train ourselves to be more joyful. This doesn't mean we have to whistle a happy tune no matter the circumstances. You don't have to pretend reality isn't real or everything is peachy keen even when it is not.

But obsessing on negative thoughts feeds into being unhappy and plays a role in depression and anxiety. Instead, try to notice and appreciate joyfulness. How can anyone stay in a bad mood petting a dog!

Get Rid of Negative Thoughts

Is negative self-talk ruining your joy. If it is then you need to change that unhealthy habit. You may run negative messages through you all the time. The good news is you can learn to change those thoughts and literally change your brain.

One of the first things to ask yourself is are these negative thoughts true. If they are not, then move them from your mind. There are other beneficial techniques known as cognitive-behavioral therapy. These exercises work part by changing your thoughts and in turn, can change your life. The less negativity in your mind the more room for joy.

Joy Promotes an Overall Healthier Lifestyle

Joy encourages positive and beneficial health habits that promote an improved sense of wellbeing. This includes eating a healthier diet, engaging in a more active lifestyle, and promote better sleeping habits. Know what works for you to be joyful. Remove the obstacles that prevent happiness.

A positive attitude can help you cope with the stress that prevents joy. If you have the ability to cope well with negative situations, then your risk for stress and anxiety is lower. With less stress, you will have an increase in joy and happiness. Your health and wellness depend on it.