

Lesson 2

Activity Scheduling

Introduction

As you're now aware of your current level of happiness after completing the happiness rating scale in lesson 1, you'll know of the many different influences to feeling happy and of your particular opportunities to improve your happiness.

Like everyone else, you'll have a baseline of happiness, or a 'set point' as it's sometimes referred to, as your genes dictate it to a certain degree. Having said that, there's much you can do to raise your happiness level and what's interesting is that it doesn't take much effort, money, or time.

Your current happiness level is a benchmark from which you can transcend above or slide below it and can be largely within your control, if you allow it to be.

Activity schedules are simply activities scheduled into your day/week/month and can include written words, photographs, or pictures and cues you to engage in them.

Just like going to the gym to get a six-pack, it's only maintained if you keep on with it. You weren't born with a six-pack, you've made it happen by ongoing exercise. It's the same with happiness, although the practices suggested on this course will be less strenuous than lifting weights six days a week!

The science

Taking ten minutes a day to write down or record in some other way, three things you're grateful for, and why, has benefits that last.

To maintain the gains you'll enjoy from doing activities that promote your sense of happiness, build in sustainable strategies if you'd like more than momentary spikes in your mood.

Studies show that scheduling activities affects the way we think about them and how we experience them.

Roughly scheduling work breaks, or when to engage in leisure pursuits leads to more enjoyment than scheduling times more strictly. So identifying a window of time in which to, for example, go for your run, bake a cake, or visit the garden centre is more beneficial than pre-selecting an exact time.

Life is boring

Mundane tasks, necessary household chores, and dare I say it, the (mixed) weather, all happen and all can lead to a feeling of nothingness, the sighs, the need to tell yourself to put one foot in front of the other. But imagine for a moment the alternative, a life where each moment is thrilling, fun-filled and overly joyous... Would you want that? Wouldn't it soon lose its appeal?

Whilst life is boring most of the time, this baseline, this status quo, is a benchmark for you to transcend above or below it and can be largely within your control, if you allow it to be.

Removing the boredom from your life

There are things you can do to bring highlights to your day, create beautiful memories, and plan future events that give you that 'Ahhhhh' feeling and once you're in the habit of thinking this way, this will not only become routine, but a habit that you won't want to break. We're not proposing that you think idealistically, imagining a life that's impracticable or impossible, but simply that you'll be able to acknowledge good times and know that you can be an agent of change and be in charge of lifting yourself out of the boredom and be able to absorb the happier moments more easily. Naturally you'll still experience times that are boring, as that's life, but you'll be able to handle these more easily once you're able to notice the highlights.

Listing your likes

Have a go at recording all the things you like to do in the table below, categorising them into fun, achievement, physical, or social.

THINGS I LIKE TO DO

FUN	ACHIEVEMENT	PHYSICAL	SOCIAL

The Benefits of Activity Scheduling

To create a happier you, it's vital to see how your time is being spent. Much of your time might be working, however, with 24 hours in the day, you can build in highlights that lift your spirit and make you glad to be alive.

Did you know that Activity Scheduling is one of the most important ways to lift mood and is discussed in many a psychological therapy session? Psychologists work with their clients on scheduling activities that have to be done with the aim of identifying periods of time that can be spent doing something more pleasurable. Sometimes,

having someone support you to fill it in, or help identify your interests and plot them into your schedule is the very assistance you'll need to get started, and before you know it, you'll be on your way to a happier you.

The aim of Activity scheduling is not to fill every moment of your day with something to do, as we all need our 'down time' when we can just let time drift along, doing nothing in particular. The aim is to create highlights to your day that bring a little joy to an otherwise mediocre day.

Have a go at adding your interests into the activity schedule where it's most appropriate. If you think you haven't the time or are feeling guilty, think again... making time for yourself to enjoy life is essential if you're to create a happier you. Even protecting 10 minutes for yourself to appreciate life can do wonders for your mood. Strolling around the garden or sitting under the canopy of a beautiful tree are two of our favourites. We've added a 'Have to' column so you can build your day realistically and spot when your 'Like' activities are able to best fit in. 'Have tos' might include, 'get up,' breakfast, work, lunch, dinner, and bed.

Creating your own activity schedule will add to the fun of planning your new happier life at your own pace; however, if you prefer, go to our website for a full weekly version of an activity schedule, where you can find a free downloadable copy.

Activity Schedule					
	Have to do	Fun activity	Sense of achievement activity	Physical activity	Social activity
Monday					
9am – 10am					
10 – 11am					
11 – 12					
12 – 2pm					

2 - 3pm					
3 - 4pm					
4 - 5pm					
5 - 6pm					
6 - 7pm					
7 - 8pm					
8 - 11pm					
11pm					

The relationship between activities and mind

As Psychologists have found, people take on challenges, to achieve and succeed when they feel good and doing things that make you feel good means that you're more able to take on tasks that provide opportunities for you to develop and give you a sense of mastery.

After just a week of completing your activity schedule, you'll soon learn about the association between activity and your mind.

#1. Look for patterns between your activity and mind.

#2. Which of your activities were linked with your most positive mood?

- What were you doing?
- Who were you with?
- Where were you?
- When was it?

#3. Which of your activities were linked with your lowest mood?

- What were you doing?
- Who were you with?
- Where were you?
- When was it?

#4. Ask yourself what you notice about the different activities you undertook and your mind?

#5. Were there any times that you didn't do anything in particular? What was your mind like on these days?

#6. On days when you were most active, how was your mind?

#7. Make a list of all the activities that made you feel positive and those that made you feel negative.

POSITIVE ACTIVITIES	NEGATIVE ACTIVITIES

Homework idea: Continue with the week's activity schedule, and build in at least one more activity that brings about a positive mind.

You might also want to add a mood rating at the side of activities in your schedule, to concrete your perception of the link between activities and mind.

This is only the start... Next week, there'll be advice on how to identify and develop your signature strengths to create a happier life.