

- Psychophysiology

WANT HAPPINESS? FOLLOW THESE PSYCHOLOGICAL HABITS

Self-care routines, sleep, regular workouts, spending time with loved ones and downtime are essential for your overall well-being

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DUBAI
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Happiness is the travel, not the destination, as British violinist Roy Goodman once said. A happy life means different things to different people. For some, it means finally living in luxury after years of gruelling hard work. For others, it could just mean living comfortably with loved ones around them. These are all subjective perspectives, and can be left for interpretation. Yet, the practice of essential psychological habits can ensure in achieving a sense of happiness. In essence, taking care of your body and mind, making time for downtime and finally, nurturing and strengthening relationships around you.

SELF-CARE FOR THE MIND AND BODY
Spas. Head massages. A visit to the ice-cream parlour. Staying in bed and bingeing on the latest Netflix series. It could also mean a lengthy and challenging hike. Self-care means a variety of things to different people. However, it doesn't have to be so complicated. Dubai-based clinical psychologist Romena Toki gives the lowdown on what key habits to follow for self-care routines. "Eat real food," she advises. "It's unfortunate that processed foods labelled with 'healthy' jargon have become the norm. When we talk about eating healthy, we mean consuming real food — chopping vegetables, cooking with real oil, adding seasonings, and creating a colourful plate of real food," she says. There is also fun in the added effort of preparing food for yourself rather than simply ordering or picking up frozen food. For those who do love cooking, practice this habit more. It's relaxing, and it makes you happy. Natalie Thomas, an American Abu Dhabi-based entrepreneur, reveals she found love for cooking in the "strangest" ways. By ordering many recipe books, "You have many of these cookbooks that are based on television shows. And these recipes just sound like so much fun. So, I ordered a Clamori Girl's cookbook for myself, and followed the recipes. I lied mixing up my television shows and cooking, so I did that for so many other shows, and as a result, I thoroughly enjoy cooking now. It's a hobby, and I also make something healthy," she says. Gashor Lane, a UAE-based wellness expert, psychologist and life coach explains the importance of mindfulness and meditation. "Do simple breathwork, every day, in the morning before you go to work. Just focus on your breathing and shut everything else out, and see if that brings you peace," she says. Lane also suggests practising gratitude, which helps in pushing the negative thoughts to the sidelines.

SLEEP AND NAPS
Naps work wonders too, as research has proved. The New York Times reported in 2013 that a short daytime nap boosts performance. According to the article, when night shift air traffic controllers were given 40 minutes to nap, and slept an average of 10 minutes, they performed much better on tests that measured vigilance and reaction time. However, make sure it's a brief nap; a lengthy three-hour siesta will

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looks like, what are the colours, textures, smells and tastes. While taking a shower, notice the temperature on your skin, the smell of your shampoo and shower gel, the sensation on your skin and head as you scrub and wash. Just a few extra minutes of focus on these daily activities have a great effect on our health," explains Toki. This sensory grounding helps in revitalising the senses.

BEING AROUND FRIENDS
Cherish your close friends and family. "Isolation, loneliness, and a lack of belonging can contribute to mental health difficulties," explains Toki. "So, nourish your social relationships. Spend time with loved ones, whether in person or virtually. Give the gift of time, wisdom and emotional support. Gifts don't need to always be material, but enhance your sense of belonging and connection," says Toki. "Downtime isn't merely about physical rest; it's also about allowing your mind to relax and rejuvenate. So, put down the devices, step away from social media, and turn off Netflix. Just start with a few minutes a day, and you'll begin to notice the benefits," she says. As Toki explains, paying attention to downtime leads to reduction in stress. "The constant engagement in work and responsibilities has been shown to increase the production of the stress hormone cortisol," she explains. "Taking time to pause from these activities allows your mind to unwind and release built-up tension," adds Toki.

DOWNTIME LEADS TO REDUCTION IN STRESS
Downtime also boosts your creativity, as she says. Many good ideas can emerge when your mind is "free to wander", as Toki says. "Take some deep breaths and notice the new ideas that might pop up for you," she says. Lane also suggests solo trips and getaways. "These are also fun to do, and you learn to enjoy your own company than consistently thinking you always need others to have fun," she says. It also permits your brain to process information. "By physically removing yourself from a stressful environment and giving your body and mind a chance to rest, you can approach challenges with a fresh perspective and clearer thinking," she says. Downtime also leads to enhanced quality of sleep.

Life begins at 40. From midlife to empty nest, this is the age that peaks during this age.

WORKOUTS
Most of us might groan at the next part, but regular workouts have a profound impact on your mental health. "You can explore activities with new friends using apps," suggests Toki. "If that feels out of your comfort zone, consider trying some-

thing online, from the comfort of your home. Even a short daily walk or a 10-minute low-impact exercise from a YouTube video can reduce stress and boost your mood by releasing endorphins, the body's natural mood lifters," she says. "Don't underestimate the power of a thorough workout," says Lane. "It awakens your brain, and you feel far more alert. Workouts can also help in boosting your creativity, as you can get good ideas from just a jog in the park," she says. These short walks are quite beneficial in easing the mind from stress and negative thoughts. Tara Pullman, a 23-year-old American expat, and Dubai-based marketing manager, found love in skating. She says the key to keeping to a workout routine, is to find something you like. "I think, it's all about finding the rhythm. I detested going to the gym. So I started with skating, which felt like a good workout. It was also a learning process, because I had no idea how to skate, and that also helped in keeping my mind active. After I got used to the idea of skating, I could motivate myself to go to the gym," she says.

GROUNDING YOURSELF
Sometimes, you just need to be with yourself. Toki suggests just spending a few minutes every day, being present with what is happening around you. "Try to reconnect with your body using your senses. While eating, pause for a second. Examine, what your food

destroy your night-time routine. This brings us to the next point. Adequate sleep. Everyone needs a good eight- to nine-hour sleep routine to feel refreshed, the next day. "Prioritise sleep as a crucial part of self-care," explains Toki. "Everyone has different sleep needs, so aim to get good quality sleep that's right for you. Start your sleep routine earlier in the evening, reminding yourself that this is to recharge your mind and body," she says.

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ROMENA TOKI ★ Psychologist

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