

Rediscovering Joy

Embracing the Art
of Having Fun



Approaching life with a sense of playfulness and whimsy isn't just fun; it's also good for your health.

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CAN YOU remember a time when playing and having fun was your full-time job? Life was carefree back then. As children, we easily embrace joy and playfulness without hesitation or overthinking. When we become adults, we lose touch with that childlike ability to laugh, play and find joy in the little things.

The benefits of joy go way beyond the reach and influence of entertainment. They affect your mental health, physical

well-being and overall life satisfaction. Research has shown that adults who keep their playful spirit lead more fulfilled lives, handle stress better and build stronger relationships.

It's important to find ways to reconnect with your natural sense of joy and make fun a regular part of your life. Learn to identify what brings you true happiness, how to overcome barriers to playfulness and how to create personal strategies that keep joy alive in your routine.

Understanding the Science of Joy

The science of joy shows us remarkable things about how our brains create and process positive experiences. When you feel joy, your brain releases chemicals affecting your mind and body. These chemicals include dopamine, which drives pleasure-seeking; serotonin, which creates satisfaction and optimism; and endorphins, which naturally relieve pain.¹

Your ability to feel joy goes beyond just momentary pleasure — it has deep roots in your biology. In fact, scientists have found that genetic factors make up 35 to 50 percent of your happiness potential.¹ Further, your brain's pleasure centers light up when you participate in enjoyable activities, triggering what scientists call a “hedonic response,” which involves multiple brain regions working together to create your experience of fun and joy.²

Joy creates measurable physical changes in your body. Laughter triggers several positive effects:³

- Muscles stay relaxed for up to 45 minutes afterward
- Increased immune cells strengthen the immune system
- Blood vessels work better, which might protect against cardiovascular issues

This mind-body connection works in both directions: Physical health influences mental well-being, and emotional state affects physical health. People who keep their sense of joy and playfulness often bounce back better from illness and build stronger relationships with others.⁴

But as we age, life changes usually reduce our natural sense of play. Studies show that 76 percent of adults say their health suffers from stress in various aspects of life, which leads to less playfulness.⁵ Society's focus on improved productivity over play, along with workplace demands, make it hard to keep that childlike sense of wonder.⁶

The biological foundations of joy explain why fun isn't just optional — it's critical for overall well-being. Your brain naturally rewards positive experiences, making joy fundamental to optimal functioning.²

Breaking Down Mental Barriers

Most adults find themselves stuck in a cycle where they put work ahead of play and tend to push fun activities aside as their responsibilities grow. Society often makes us feel we should focus on work rather than leisure.⁷ As a result, adults

often experience mental barriers, including:

- *Limiting beliefs about fun.* Your brain creates barriers to fun and joy to protect you. These self-made restrictions come from your mind's need to protect you from getting hurt or disappointed.⁸ Here are some common thoughts that hold people back: “Play isn't productive”; “I'm too old for fun activities”; “I have too many responsibilities”; or “What will others think?”

- *Guilty feelings about having fun.* The guilt about taking time for fun is real. Many adults struggle to be spontaneously playful and think it's only “proper” during structured activities like sports.⁹ Parents and caregivers often feel this guilt more strongly. They worry that taking time for themselves might hurt others.

- *The perception that play is not necessary.* Many adults think play is fun but unnecessary. However, giving yourself permission to enjoy life can help you break free from this mental block. Playful people are better at handling challenges. They can see things differently and enjoy simple moments.⁷ The key is changing your point of view to see play as something you need, not just something nice to have.

To develop a permission-to-play mindset, look at your daily schedule with possibilities instead of limits. One study showed that 19 out of 22 adults could be more playful when someone asked them to try.¹⁰ This indicates that permission often acts as the catalyst to discover your natural ability to feel joy.

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Note that play isn't just about what you do but how you approach what you do. By staying curious and open-minded, you can turn everyday tasks into fun experiences.⁷ When you prioritize play, it becomes a must-have part of your day, making you less likely to skip this vital part of staying healthy.

The path to enjoying fun means pushing past deep-rooted cultural and personal obstacles.⁷ Understanding these barriers comes from learning rather than being born with them, which helps you start breaking them down. Your ability to feel joy hasn't gone anywhere — you just need to find it again through conscious permission and practice.

Cultivating Playful Awareness

You don't need special occasions or expensive activities to experience joy. Joy can be found anywhere!¹¹ You can train yourself to spot these delightful moments in your daily life right now, right where you are. Here's how:

Playfulness and fun positively change your brain chemistry, build stronger relationships and improve overall well-being.

- *Mindfulness in moments of joy.* The present moment turns ordinary experiences into extraordinary ones. Emotions create feedback loops — a burst of joy makes you more attentive to pleasure in your surroundings. This heightened awareness leads you to participate in more enjoyable activities, creating what researchers call “upward spirals.”

- *Recognize daily opportunities for fun.* Joy waits in plain sight for your attention. Here are some proven ways to spot these moments:

- Look in nature for floating clouds or unexpected rainbows.
- Notice patterns, colors and textures in your environment.
- Pay attention to sounds, smells and tactile sensations.
- Seek out soft edges and gentle movements in your surroundings like the swaying of trees in a gentle breeze.
- Watch the sun rise or set. Either of these experiences can bring about a profound feeling of joy.

- *Build a joy-spotting practice.* Joy-spotting is a mindfulness practice that makes your environment a tool for emotional well-being. Sharing these moments with others makes the joy more intense. Start your practice by taking a few minutes daily to notice things that spark joy.

Your joy-spotting experience becomes richer when you use all your senses. This awareness helps you find joy in unexpected places — the warmth of sunlight on your face, children's laughter or a smooth stone's texture in your palm.

The beauty of this practice lies in its simplicity. You don't need special equipment or training: Just be willing to pause and notice. These brief moments of mindful appreciation can change your point of view, helping you delight in previously overlooked parts of your daily routine.

Joy-spotting isn't about forcing positive emotions — it helps you become skilled at recognizing and savoring natural moments of pleasure. These small instances of joy build upon each other as you practice, creating a more vibrant daily experience.

Creating Your Joy Blueprint

What brings you joy will be unique to you: You need a personal approach to finding it that matches your priorities and patterns. Personality types affect how people experience and express joy, making building a strategy that aligns with your natural tendencies important.

- 1) *Map your fun personality type.* Your experience of joy starts with understanding yourself and the way you experience fun. Knowing your fun personality type can light up how you see the world and help you find the core of who you are.¹ Think about where you tend to find joy. Which of the following best describes you?

- The Social Enthusiast: You run on shared experiences
 - The Creative Explorer: You find joy in making and finding
 - The Quiet Contemplator: You delight in peaceful moments
 - The Active Adventurer: You seek joy through movement
- 2) *Design personal joy rituals.* Simple rituals can change ordinary moments into sources of delight. Your rituals could include:

- Morning magic. Your day should start with activities that spark joy. People who start their day with intention tend to feel more fulfilled throughout their activities.
- Mindful moments. You need time to pause and reflect. Regular rituals help people manage emotions and challenges more effectively.

- 3) *Set playfulness goals.* Joy-focused goals are different from traditional goal setting. People maintain better momentum and experience less stress when they incorporate playfulness into their goals.

The secret lies in creating what experts call “unconditional fun,” which means finding joy no matter the external circumstances. You should identify activities that lift your spirits and schedule them often. Having something to look forward to, even small pleasures, can significantly boost your mood.

Track your progress but keep it light. You could document your joy experience through photos, journal entries or a simple happiness scale. Doing this will help measure your progress while staying connected to what matters most — your authentic experience of fun and joy.

Sustaining the Joy Journey

Lasting change requires more than good intentions; it requires a strong support system and consistent progress tracking. Those with strong support networks can maintain positive lifestyle changes and experience lasting joy with more ease.

1) *Build support systems.* The path to lasting joy becomes easier when you have the right people around you. People who share space with supportive individuals who understand their goals achieve better success. Your joy network should have these key components:

- A mentor who exhibits the playful spirit you want to develop
- Friends who push you to have fun
- Family members who understand your need for play
- Activity partners with shared interests
- Professional connections who value work-life balance

2) *Maintain momentum through challenges.* Life's obstacles cannot derail your path to joy. Building resilience through practical strategies makes the difference. Setbacks become opportunities when you use what researchers call “constructive feedback” — turning challenges into growth instead of seeing them as failures. Good self-care remains essential with regular exercise, enough rest and time for activities you enjoy.

3) *Measure your progress.* Your joy tracking should be simple. Regular checks of your emotional well-being help maintain momentum and show areas where you can grow. These proven methods help measure your progress:

- Daily check-ins: Rate each day on a simple scale (+2 for great days to -2 for challenging ones).³
- Joy journaling: Write down moments that bring you delight.
- Physical indicators: Watch changes in your energy levels and stress response.
- Social metrics: Count genuine laughs and meaningful connections.

Tracking good and bad experiences gives you a complete picture of your emotional well-being. The key is consistency in your tracking methods, not perfection.


Your support system plays a vital role in this measurement process. Sharing progress with trusted people increases accountability and motivation. Regular check-ins with your support network let you discuss challenges, celebrate wins and adjust your approach as needed.

Joy measurement isn't about perfect scores — it helps you understand patterns and adjust for continued growth. People who keep flexible goals while tracking progress report higher satisfaction levels.

A Journey Worth Taking

Joy is essential to your identity, not just a childhood memory. Science shows that playfulness and fun positively change your brain chemistry, build stronger relationships and improve overall well-being.

You don't need dramatic life changes to make joy a priority. Small, purposeful steps can reshape your daily life. These include identifying your fun personality type, creating joy rituals and building supportive connections. Challenges will pop up, but you can track your progress and keep flexible goals to maintain momentum.

Your joy journey begins when you give yourself permission to play. Life offers fresh chances to find wonder through mindful awareness, creative exploration or shared moments with others. The more you practice spotting joy and nurturing your playful spirit, the more you'll realize that happiness isn't a destination — it's a natural state ready to be rediscovered. 

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