

Over 750 hacks for
health, happiness and success

CHEAT SHEETS FOR LIFE



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For my father, who influenced me to value science.

For my mother, who inspired me to practice kindness.

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WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

When I was a child, my father encouraged me to read non-fiction. So, in addition to my towers of fiction, I started reading books on science, philosophy, and self-help. And I discovered, between their pages, useful insights that could help me make my life better. As I grew older, I came to love non-fiction even more than fiction, and I started reading deeply about happiness, productivity, and success. I turned my lengthy morning and evening commutes into library visits, listening to audiobooks on my pet subjects, eventually completing over 70 books in a year.

I started jotting down notes from my readings, categorising them according to the area of my life they would benefit. I discovered that, across nearly every dimension of my life, I didn't need to reinvent the wheel. Someone, somewhere, had experienced the same problems and performed scientific studies to identify which actions produced the best outcomes the majority of the time. In effect, it was possible to derive a handbook for life, based on the efforts of hundreds of researchers.

So that's exactly what I did. After decades spent combing through, saving, bookmarking, and taking notes from research, articles, Yale courses, and hundreds of books, I built the book I've been seeking all my life – a concise handbook of science-backed advice on 17 dimensions of life – from health to money to parenting.

My hope is that, rather than making it up as you go along, you too can benefit from the knowledge I've derived from decades of research. Armed with these insights, I hope you will craft for yourself a life that brings you incredible health, happiness, and success.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In a moment, you're going to be exposed to a wealth of information on the tactics that research shows can point you towards health, happiness and success. You may feel excited to start implementing all these ideas at once. For the perfectionists out there (you know who you are!), I want to assure you that you don't need to act on every single item in order to see big improvements in your life. Even I, as the author, don't practice every one of these strategies!

Instead, I would encourage you to pick out a few ideas that most resonate with you from every chapter, and strive to build these into your life. In some cases, just knowing the best practices will be enough to help you make great decisions that benefit your life. In other cases, you may need to change your habits.

Where a change in habits is needed, remember to start small. Instead of taking on several new habits at once, list them out in order of priority, and then practice the first one until it is a regular part of your routine, before starting on the next. See the chapter on *Motivation* for some great pointers on the science of habit formation. You can also download the Cheat Sheets for Life Habit Planner resource by typing `cheatsheets.life/#resources` into your web browser, or simply by clicking [here](#).

Make this book work for you. Read it in order or skip around to the chapters you think would most benefit you. Treat it as a guide you can pick up anytime you want to perform better in any dimension of life.

Finally, I encourage you to explore the *References* section at the end of the book to read further on any suggestion that is of special interest to you.

EVERYDAY HAPPINESS

"Of this be sure: You do not find the happy life... You make it."

Thomas S. Monson

We all want to be happier. Luckily, while 50% of our happiness does derive from our genetic setpoint, and 10% from our life circumstances, a whopping 40% is determined by our own actions, thoughts, and intentions – it's in our control. Try these practices to build more joy into your life.

Cooking up instant happiness

1. **Smile** – Smiling tricks your brain into thinking you must be happy, as much as 2,000 bars of chocolate or receiving 20,000 dollars in cash! Even a fake smile counts. For an even bigger boost, try laughing.
2. **Walk happy** – The way you walk affects your mood. Avoid slouching and walking slowly. Instead, take longer strides, hold your head high, and swing your arms.
3. **Make music work** – Songs with 60-80 beats per minute (but no lyrics) can reduce stress. Find a playlist on YouTube. Actively try to feel happier when listening to upbeat music – it works.
4. **Get out in nature** – Reap the benefits of going green. Just 20 minutes in nature lowers stress hormones. Even a house plant

or looking at photos of natural scenes helps you recover from stress.

5. **Savour this moment** – Appreciation is a more powerful predictor of life satisfaction than personality, gratitude, gender, age, or ethnicity. For best results, use all your senses when you savour the moment.
6. **Consider the worst** – Right now, consider all the minor choices and occurrences that had to happen to make the most fulfilling parts of your life possible. Then, imagine your life if they had never happened.
7. **Take photos** – Did you know that taking photos can actually help you enjoy an experience more? Go on – get clicking!
8. **Focus** – You're less happy when your mind wanders than when you're focused on what you're doing. Avoid multitasking and get absorbed.
9. **Rediscover the past** – Reminiscing (even about normal, everyday experiences) can generate a surprising amount of happiness.
10. **Plan a trip** – Planning a trip can make you feel great, even if you don't take it. Design for yourself the perfect day with everything you most enjoy – then go live it!

Adopting happiness habits

1. **Practice gratitude** – In a study of character strengths, gratitude was found to be the single best predictor of wellbeing. Start keeping a gratitude journal today to build the gratitude habit.

2. **Bask in the sunlight** – Exposure to sunlight accounts for over 90% of most individuals' vitamin D requirements. Why does that matter? Because Vitamin D naturally boosts mood and helps prevent depression.
3. **Exercise** – Just 20 minutes of exercise can boost your happiness for 12 hours. Meanwhile, exercising in nature can improve mental health in just 5 minutes. And group exercise for 45 mins 3-5 times a week helps mental health most. Also, exercise with motivating music – it will improve your mood by 15%.
4. **Take up yoga or tai chi** – Yoga boosts mood, reduces stress, and improves brain function, and tai chi has similar benefits in reducing mental and emotional stress.
5. **Master mindfulness** – Mindfulness meditation can reduce levels of everyday stress, with longer-lasting effects than a vacation.
6. **Avoid social media** – For most people, using social media reduces happiness and lowers self-esteem. In fact, cutting out social media can have a greater impact on your wellbeing than increased income.
7. **Hit on a hobby** – Hobbies make people happier than escapist leisure like shopping or TV. For the biggest impact, choose a hobby that fully engages you, involves learning a new skill, spending time with others, or doing something nice for someone else.
8. **Read** – Reading reduces stress levels by 68%, which is more than virtually any other activity including listening to music,

drinking tea/coffee, or walking. And the positive effects emerge within just 6 minutes!

9. **Express yourself** – Making or tending things (especially using your hands) enhances mental health. Baking can boost confidence, and gardening can reduce stress even more than reading.
10. **Find flow** – Strive to take part in activities that are challenging (roughly 4% beyond your current ability is ideal) and yet achievable, where you can see the results of your efforts immediately – this combination increases the likelihood of putting you in a state of optimal experience or “flow”.
11. **Be kind** – Do 5 acts of kindness to boost happiness (the effects will be greater if you do them all in one day rather than spread them over a week). Kind acts make people happier than bodily pleasures, especially when done spontaneously and if they involve using one’s character strengths.
12. **Volunteer** – 78% of those who volunteer say it lowers their stress levels. Start volunteering today to feel the benefits.
13. **Enjoy a massage** – Getting a massage can reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol by 1/3 and increase happy brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine to the same extent.

Designing lifelong happiness

1. **Find a purpose** – Having a purpose for life has been shown to generate the longest lasting form of happiness.
2. **Try fixed role therapy** – 24 hours a day for two weeks, try behaving as though you have the personality traits you would most like to have. They may become part of you.

3. **Use your character strengths** – Those who use their character strengths (the positive ways in which they think, feel, and behave that come easily to them) experience better physical and emotional wellbeing. Take the VIA Character Strengths quiz online for free to find out yours today. Then strive to use them every single day.
4. **Set a daily intention** – One of the most established and validated models of psychological wellness stresses ‘autonomy’ as the biggest driver of happiness. To introduce more autonomy to your life, decide your intention each day – what do you want to accomplish today?
5. **Act flexible** – Flexible people lead happier lives. Simply acting flexibly can increase your flexibility. ‘Luckier’ people are open to new possibilities and try new experiences, listen to their intuition, are optimistic, and look for the good in ‘bad’ situations.
6. **Curate positive endings** – The ending of an experience matters when it comes to making happy memories, so go out of your way to make the last part of anything the best part.
7. **Restrict pleasures** – Giving up something you enjoy for a while (maybe chocolate?) prevents habituation and intensifies pleasure.
8. **Indulge occasionally** – Guilt over giving into pleasures fades faster than regrets over missing out on the fun. Remember to occasionally choose a little vice over virtue!
9. **Age happier** – Many scientists agree that in general, people get happier with age. 33, 55, the 70s: these have all been called “the happiest age” in various studies and surveys.

10. **Live near what you like to do** – The closer you live to the amenities you enjoy (think within 15 minutes), the happier you are.
11. **Seek blue spaces** – Living within view of water bodies like lakes and the ocean has an even stronger positive effect on mental health than living in sight of greenery.
12. **Improve your circumstances** – Annually track your growth in satisfaction across key areas in your life (e.g. love, profession, play, friends, health, finances, overall) and plan how to make adjustments where needed.

ACCESS ALL 17 CHAPTERS



I hope you enjoyed this free sample chapter! If you like what you read, consider buying the complete book in e-book or paperback format to access over 750 science-backed hacks that will directly and immediately improve your life. You can do so by scanning this code or by [clicking here](#).

Find out what science has to say about succeeding in:

- Social relationships
- Emotional resilience
- Health
- Food
- Sleep
- Love
- Parenting
- Money
- Learning
- Work
- Motivation
- Productivity
- Leadership
- Persuasion
- Giving
- Green living

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