



**Action for Happiness**

Join the movement. Be the change.



# The Happiness Challenge

January 2011



**Can a few simple daily actions make us happier?**



Produced for use by BBC Breakfast, January 2011

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

### **Thanks for downloading the 'Happiness Challenge' workbook.**

As the name suggests it's all about happiness and whether some simple daily actions can have a positive impact on how happy we are and how happy we make the people around us.

We're going to start by asking you to think about how you're feeling about life and what happiness means for you.

We will then ask you to try a few simple actions out over the course of a week. They are all things that recent scientific research suggests can have a positive impact on people's feelings of happiness and fulfilment.

We want to hear how you get on with the actions as part of your normal daily routine. We're interested in how you choose to do them, whether you find them enjoyable or difficult and how you feel about it all at the end.

## Can we affect our happiness?

Each of us is unique and how happy we are depends on lots of different factors including our genes, our circumstances and our approach to life.

We often think that our circumstances – where we live, what we have, what we earn and so on – have a big effect on how happy we are. However, these things tend to have much less impact than most people expect.

Instead, research suggests that a big part of how happy we are is determined by our attitude and choices, rather than our circumstances.

**So we have an opportunity to make ourselves and others happier by the way we approach our lives and the actions we choose to take.**

## About this workbook

This workbook is intended for **you**, so please write things which are a true reflection of how you feel. There are no right or wrong answers.

The Happiness Challenge was put together by **Action for Happiness** to support a BBC Breakfast feature on happiness. Action for Happiness is a charity which aims to encourage and enable the move to a happier society. Find out more and join the movement at [www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)

The Happiness Challenge was developed in partnership with **Headspace** which specialises in teaching mindfulness meditation. You can find out more at [www.getsomeheadspace.com](http://www.getsomeheadspace.com)

## Your happiness

**Overall, how happy would you say you are these days?**

Give your rating on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high).

Score out of 10

## What is happiness?

Take a moment to think about what happiness means to you. Note down whatever comes in to your head.

***What does happiness mean to you?***

Example: *Feeling good about how things are going*

Now think about specific things that often make you happy. These could be activities, people, places or anything else that comes to mind.

***What things make you happy?***

Example: *A relaxing day at home with my family*

## The Happiness Challenge

We would like you to try some **simple actions** in your daily lives, initially over the course of a week. They may be things you already do. If not, then you may want to make them part of your on-going routine if they're useful.

They are all things that recent scientific research has shown can have a positive impact on people's feelings of happiness and fulfilment.

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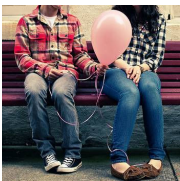
### Be Mindful

Do less and notice more



### Be Grateful

Remember the good things



### Be Kind

Do things for others

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### Want more action ideas?

These are just three of the many areas where scientific research suggests we can take action to make both ourselves and others happier.

For more evidence-based ideas to increase happiness and well-being check out the **Five Ways to Wellbeing**, developed by **nef** as part of the UK Government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital.

[www.neweconomics.org/projects/five-ways-well-being](http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/five-ways-well-being)

Also, in April 2011 the new interactive **Action for Happiness website** will be launched packed full of ideas for happier living. Sign up to find out more.

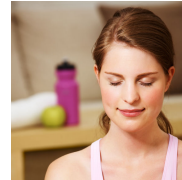
## Be Mindful

Do less and notice more

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment. When we're mindful we become more aware of our thoughts and feelings and better able to manage them.

Being mindful can boost our concentration, improve our relationships and help with stress or depression. It can even have a positive effect on physical problems like chronic pain.

Anyone can learn to be mindful. It's simple, you can do it anywhere, and the results can be life-changing.



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### Action: Take 10

**Take 10 minutes each day to do a simple mindfulness meditation.**

Many of us spend much of our time focused either on the past or on the future, paying very little attention to what is happening right now.

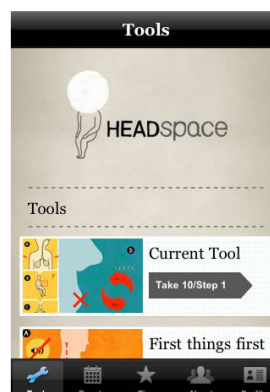
Being mindful involves staying in the moment, spending more time noticing what's going on both inside ourselves and in our surroundings. Rather than trying to change things it involves accepting the way that things are, for better or for worse.

Start by following the **guided 10 minute meditation** on the BBC Breakfast website: [www.bbc.co.uk/breakfast](http://www.bbc.co.uk/breakfast)

### Additional tools and information

Find out more and do a free 10-day daily guided meditation on the Headspace website: [www.getsomeheadspace.com/tools](http://www.getsomeheadspace.com/tools)

You can also download the free Headspace iPhone app here: <http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/id384434793>



## Be Grateful

Remember the good things

Being grateful is about much more than just saying thank you – it's about not taking things for granted and having a sense of appreciation and thankfulness for life.

People who are grateful tend to be happier, healthier and more fulfilled. Being grateful can help people cope with stress and can even have a beneficial effect on heart rate.



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### Action: Three Good Things

**Each day write down three good things that happened. They can be anything you feel good about or grateful for.**

Even on a bad day there are normally some things that we can feel good about. Taking time to be grateful is not about ignoring the bad things – it just helps us focus our attention more on the positive, rather than dwell on the negative.

To get used to the idea, start by filling in the boxes below to describe three good things that happened to you **yesterday** and why they were good.

Try to include **why** you felt each of the things was really good.

<p><b>Good Thing 1</b></p> <p>Example: <i>Best night's sleep for ages so felt much more energetic!</i></p>
<p><b>Good Thing 2</b></p> <p>Example: <i>Lunch with Steve and Jane – great to see old friends again</i></p>
<p><b>Good Thing 3</b></p> <p>Example: <i>Home in time to bath the kids. We really had fun together</i></p>

Now repeat this activity **at the end of each day** for a week. Use the blank boxes on the following pages to write down your Three Good Things down each day.

Note: Gratitude exercises are based on work by Emmons and McCullough, (2003) and Seligman, M.E., Steen, T.A., Park, N. and Peterson, C., (2005).

## Three Good Things exercise

**Write down three good things that happened to you today. They can be anything you feel good about or grateful for.**

Use this sheet to keep a record of your Three Good Things each day over the course of a week. Try to include **why** you felt each of the things was really good.

Try to write down your three good things every day if possible – but if for some reason you miss a day then don't worry, just carry on the next day.

You could even talk to your family or friends about your three good things and ask them about theirs.

<b>1</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

<b>2</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

<b>3</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

### Three Good Things exercise (continued)

<b>4</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

<b>5</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

<b>6</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

<b>7</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>Good Thing 1</i>	
<i>Good Thing 2</i>	
<i>Good Thing 3</i>	

## Be Grateful

Remember the good things



### Action: Letter of Gratitude

#### **Who are you really grateful to?**

Think of three people who have been a really positive influence in your life and that you feel really grateful to.

They could be a member of your family, an old teacher, long-lost friend, colleague or someone else who has made a real difference in your life.

***Person 1:** Who is it and why are you grateful to them?*

***Person 2:** Who is it and why are you grateful to them?*

***Person 3:** Who is it and why are you grateful to them?*

**Now choose one of these people to write to and tell them how grateful you are; perhaps someone you've not thanked properly before.**

Think about the impact this person had on you and write a letter to tell them:

- What specifically are you grateful for?
- How did they help you?
- How did it help make you the person you are today?

You can write the letter any way you like – but try to be really in touch with the feeling of being grateful to them as you write.

If possible, arrange to **visit the person** and read the letter aloud to them. Otherwise post or email the letter to them and maybe follow up with a phone call.

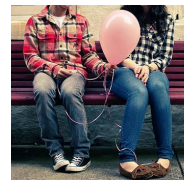
***Who did you write your letter of gratitude to? How did it feel?***

A close-up of a hand holding a pen, writing the words "Thank you" in a cursive script on a white surface.

## Be Kind

### Do things for others

Doing things to help others is not only good for the recipients - it has a positive payback for our happiness and health too. When people experience kindness it also makes them kinder as a result – so kindness is contagious!



As the saying goes: "if you want to feel good, do good"

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### Action: Daily Acts of Kindness

#### **Perform an extra act of kindness each day.**

This could be a compliment, a helping hand, a hug, a gift or something else. The act may be large or small and the recipient may not even be aware of it.

Ideally your acts of kindness should be beyond the kind things you already do on a regular basis. And of course the acts mustn't put you or others in danger!

Do at least one extra kind act each day for a week, ideally a different one each day.

Here are some ideas for acts of kindness:

1. Give up your seat	21. Tell someone if you notice they're doing a good job
2. Hold a door open for someone	22. Pass on a book you've enjoyed
3. Give a (sincere) compliment	23. Say sorry (you know who to)
4. Make someone laugh	24. Forgive someone for what they've done
5. Give someone a hug	25. Visit a sick friend, relative or neighbour
6. Take time to really listen to someone	26. Buy an unexpected gift for someone
7. Make someone new feel welcome	27. Bake something for a neighbour
8. Let one car in on every journey	28. Pay for someone in the queue behind
9. Give directions to someone who's lost	29. Do a chore that you don't normally do
10. Have a conversation with a stranger	30. Help out someone in need
11. Pick up litter as you walk	31. Offer to look after a friend's children
12. Let someone in front of you in the supermarket queue	32. Offer to mow your neighbour's lawn
13. Tell someone they mean a lot to you	33. Donate your old things to charity
14. Let someone have your parking spot	34. Give food to a homeless person and take time to talk with them
15. Read a story with a child	35. Visit someone who may be lonely
16. Offer your change to someone struggling to find the right amount	36. Give blood
17. Treat a loved one to breakfast in bed	37. Get back in contact with someone you've lost touch with
18. Buy cakes or fruit for your colleagues	38. Organise a fundraising event
19. Invite your neighbour round for a drink and a chat	39. Volunteer your time for a charity
20. Offer to help with someone's shopping	40. Plan a street party

Note: Kindness benefits and exercises based on work by Lyubomirsky, S. (2007)

## Acts of kindness exercise

Do at least one extra kind act each day for a week, ideally a different one each day.

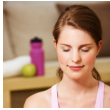
Ideally your act of kindness should be something beyond the kind things you do on a regular basis.

Use this sheet to keep a record of your acts of kindness. You can also note down how you felt about doing them and whether you found them easy or difficult.

<b>1</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Day/date:</b>
<i>What did you do? Who for? How did it go?</i>	

## My Action Plan

Things to try this week



### Be Mindful

- **Daily 10-minute Mindfulness exercise**



### Be Kind

- **Daily Act(s) of kindness**



### Be Grateful

- **Three Good Things each day**
- **Letter of Gratitude**

#### Tips to get more out of the exercises

If you find any or all of these actions useful then you may want to make them part of your on-going routine. Don't worry if you find some actions work well for you and others don't - everyone has their personal preferences. Variety is good so try different exercises on different days.

**Mindfulness** has most benefit when done regularly, ideally every day. But the other actions don't necessarily need to be done every day. **Acts of kindness** are great to make part of your normal routine, but the effects can be greater if you do a number of different kind acts all on the same day. The **Three Good Things** action can have a positive impact if carried out every few days or even just once a week. The **Letter of Gratitude** is normally a one-off activity, depending on who you want to thank - but of course you can still take time to thank the people who help you day-to-day.

**"Happiness is not something ready made.  
It comes from your own actions"**

Dalai Lama



### Action for Happiness

Join the movement. Be the change.

If you think happiness matters and want to be part of creating a happier society for everyone, then join thousands of others at [www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)