

Healthy & Resilient You

Resolve to Be Happier

Miswanting and missing the joy



Why do you think we make resolutions? What's the motivation for vowing to join that gym on New Year's Day, get that promotion by the time we're 30, or find a new romantic partner by Valentine's Day?

You'd think it's about getting the muscles, or more money and status, or someone to *Lady and the Tramp* with over a bowl of overpriced V-Day spaghetti. But it isn't, really. **It's that we expect those things will make us happy.**

Why is it, then, that when we achieve the beach bod, the promotion, or the soulmate, the happiness is either missing or short-lived?

Wanting and Expecting the Wrong Things

Psychologists Daniel Gilbert and Timothy Wilson coined the term miswanting to describe our tendency to pursue things that we assume will make us happy but ultimately don't. This trait is part of what happiness scientist Dr. Laurie Santos calls *Annoying Features of the Mind* that sabotage our pursuit of happiness.

1 **Intuitions (Miswanting)** – We often pursue the things we think we should—more money or possessions, status, or a new relationship—when these things don't have the power to make us happy.



2 **Reference points** – We compare ourselves and our lives to others too much and too unfavorably, so we don't notice when we're doing well because it always seems like someone is doing better.



3 **Hedonic adaptation** – Enjoyable things that make us happy eventually lose their luster as we get used to them.



4 **Impact bias** – We overestimate the impact something will have on our happiness.



Understanding these mental pitfalls helps us know to avoid them and take a new approach.

Just Get Happy

There is no magic formula for being happy. But, by mindfully focusing our time and attention on a few simple habits, we can rewire our brains and, over time, change our behaviors from happiness-thwarting to happiness-building.



Nurture Human Connections – Studies show that happy people engage in real-world socialization more than their unhappy peers. Instead of using your phone to connect with others via social media or text, use the actual phone. Dial up a friend or family member and strike up a conversation. If possible, make plans to hang out in person. [Check out this content](#) for a more in-depth look at the importance of strong social connections and tips for strengthening them.



Care Outward – Taking care of ourselves is important, but research indicates that we experience greater happiness when caring for others. Even something as simple as holding a door for someone or offering them a compliment can give us a happy jolt, and we can surprisingly feel like we have more time for ourselves when we [spend time helping others](#).



Find the Light – The world feels particularly heavy these days, and that makes it easy for us to fall into negative thought patterns. [Looking on the bright side](#) and finding the good in people and situations whenever we can are crucial mood-boosters. Practicing [realistic optimism](#) is also a great way to reach our goals while improving happiness levels along the way.



Celebrate and Appreciate – A big reason why good circumstances and achievements don't make us happy is that we don't take the

time to notice and celebrate them. Mindfully stop throughout your day to enjoy the little things in life. Smell the flowers. Savor your coffee in the morning instead of gulping it down. Notice and appreciate when others are kind, and make a big deal when you reach a goal or milestone.



Move Around – Even adding as little as 20 minutes of extra movement into your daily routine can improve mood and wellbeing. And you don't have to do a full gym workout or run for miles. Anything helps. Take one long walk or a few short ones each day. Ride your bike or put on some music and have your own mini dance party.

These practices aren't meant to replace goals or resolutions but to help you enjoy life more as you work toward them. Incorporating one or more into your daily routine can significantly improve your levels of happiness and wellbeing.



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