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WAYS TO BRIGHTEN YOUR DAY

Try these simple pointers for a fast-track to cloud nine

1 Have a hug

Some of us are natural huggers, some aren't. But if you're not the type to wrap your arms around your loved ones, you should start as the University of California has declared that the touch or sight of a partner has an anesthetising effect on women. Also, the University of North Carolina's research has shown that women who get more hugs have higher levels of oxytocin - the "hormone of love" - that instills you with feelings of trust and security. Skin on skin contact has long been proven to be a mood booster, so hold hands with your honey, give a friend a bear hug or treat yourself to that dreamt-of massage.

2 Walk like a supermodel

Okay, so you may feel slightly foolish doing so, but a study by Skidmore College found that people who take larger strides and swing their arms when they walk feel happier than those who shuffle along taking short steps. By standing tall and walking big, your blood flows more freely, improving both your heart rate and your mood. Practice along JBR Walk. Maybe after dark....



3 Lend a helping hand

Acts of kindness to others make you feel happy: fact. A survey carried out by the University of Louisville in Kentucky discovered that people felt happier and more purposeful when they took part in more meaningful activities and did something good. Supporting this theory, psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky from the University of California at Riverside carried out studies that found subjects enjoyed a notable improvement in mood when they did five altruistic acts per week. Whether it's a stranger or a loved one, go out and do something nice for someone today and savour that helper's high.

4 Tidy up

You know how your mother used to constantly nag the teenage you because “a messy room means a messy mind”? Well, she was right. Janine Adams and Shannon Wilkinson, co-creators of Declutter Happy Hour (declutterhappyhour.com), claim that clutter is an obstacle to happiness and that being surrounded by a bunch of messy junk drains your energy and leaves you feeling overwhelmed. So start cleaning up those surfaces and organising those piles of papers – you can take your time and do it bit by bit so the task doesn’t seem so daunting. Before you know it, being surrounded by clean, orderly environs is going to calm you down from the inside. Don’t worry, you don’t have to tell your mother she was right.



7 Make a run for it

Yes, we know it’s hot. Yes, we know that there’s a good film on telly. Yes, we know it hurts. But sports psychologists at the University of Essex have discovered that sprinting can boost your mood, thanks to the increase of noradrenaline hormones and endorphins. Research from Technische Universität München and the University of Bonn in Germany, has proven that a “runner’s high” really does exist and that some of those endorphins are released in areas of the brain that help suppress pain. A natural pain-killer, happiness-inducer, and a great way to get fit – what more could you ask for from one activity?

5 Flash those pearly whites

Always find yourself grimacing? It’s time to get your grin on. A study by Clark University found that students who were encouraged to smile actually felt happier. Meanwhile, psychologists at the University of Cardiff found that people who can’t frown due to Botox injections are typically happier than those who can furrow their brow, since emotions aren’t restricted to the brain and our bodily reactions can reinforce feelings. So turn that frown upside down whether you feel like it or not – it might actually make you happier!



6 Snuggle into bed

In a series of experiments conducted by Yale University, researchers found that the weight, texture and feel of things people touched changed the way they felt and behaved, and even the words they used when speaking. Soft, warm and comfortable surfaces were more conducive to gentle and trusting behaviour so in other words, the snugglier the environment, the more positive the mood. That explains why it was so hard to let go of that childhood blanket...

8 Eat a banana... but only the peel

According to researchers at Taiwan’s Chung Shan Medical University, the ingredients contained in banana peel increase levels of serotonin, the chemical known as the “happy hormone”. While you could just eat the skin raw (it won’t taste great), the Taiwanese researchers suggest boiling the peel in water then drinking it. Or we suggest zesting it and using it in cooking. Either way, it may give you a new appetite for life.

9 Always look on the bright side

Is your glass half full or half empty? Psychologist and author Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph. D, who has carried out extensive research on optimism and happiness, suggests that being optimistic might actually make you happier. Backing this up, a study of Harvard University students showed that those who were positive thinkers at age 25 were significantly healthier at ages 45 and 60 than the pessimists. Go on, embrace the power of positive thinking.

10 Channel your inner Glee

We may have a good old giggle at *X Factor* but it could be those contestants that are having the last laugh. Research from the RIKEN Brain Science Institute in Japan has shown that singing activates stimuli that releases the feel-good chemical dopamine in animal brains (and yes, that includes humans), triggering feelings of joy. Singing in a group is even better – a survey by the Sidney de Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health revealed that choral singing resulted in improved psychological wellbeing. Haul yourself down to Harry Ghatto’s, sharpish! ●