

# Science of Happiness

## Key Terms

**Social comparison:** the idea that we decide how well we are doing by comparing ourselves to others.

**Gratitude:** being thankful / grateful.

**Mind wandering:** a natural feature of the mind, whereby we stop focusing on the present activity and start thinking about the past, future and other people.

**Relive:** to experience bad events as though they are happening again

**Regret:** to wish we had done things differently

**Ruminate:** cows ruminate when they bring up food and chew it again. Humans ruminate when they bring up bad events and think them over again.

**Catastrophise:** we imagine a disaster (a catastrophe) is going to happen.

**Mindfulness:** a strategy which can help us focus on now and stop mind wandering.

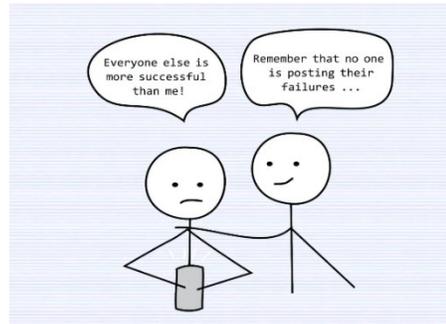
**Sleep deprivation:** not having enough sleep usually defined as less than 7 hours a night)

## Things that **don't** make us happy (but we think they do): ❌

- Social media
- Good job
- Lots of money
- Awesome stuff
- True love
- Perfect body
- Perfect grades

## Things that **do** make us happy (but we think they don't): ✅

- Gratitude
- Kindness
- Mindfulness
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Social connection



## Social media

In 2014, they created fake social media sites. Some people were shown sites of amazing people (beautiful, successful etc). They showed other people sites full of 'unsuccessful' people. Sites full of amazing people made people a lot sadder. Sites full of 'sad' people: no major impact.

This is because, when we think about happiness, we tend to compare ourselves to other people. We call this social comparison

Solutions to social comparison:

1. Take time off social media. Sounds radical, but this can make us a lot happier.
2. Remind yourself that social media is not real. People don't post the bad stuff that is going on for them. Only the good stuff and some of that isn't real.
3. Practice gratitude  
Reminding ourselves of all the things in our life that are good, stops us focusing on the negative social comparisons.

## Gratitude

In one study they asked people to write down every day what they were grateful for. They found:

- People felt their life as a whole was better
- People felt the next week was going to be better
- Physical symptoms of pain were less
- People made healthier choices e.g. physical exercise

In another study they asked volunteers to write a letter to someone they were grateful for and then give the letter to them. This made people happier 6 months later.

## Kindness

Most people predict, they would be happier if they spent money on themselves rather than someone else. However, it turns out spending money on other people makes you happier than spending it on yourself

One study in 2006 found that happier people:

- Think about doing more kind things
- Remember their kind acts more
- Do more kind things than those who are unhappy

Another study in 2005, showed that:

- People who did 5 acts of kindness in one day, increased the happiness the most
- People who did 5 acts of kindness on different days increased their happiness, but not by as much.

## Mindfulness

Our minds wander 47% of the time. This means that in a 60 minute lesson our minds will have wandered for 28 minutes! When our mind wanders, we think about the past, the future and what other people think of us. But not, the present!

When we think about the past we...

- Relive: we experience bad events as though they are happening again
- Regret: think about things we wish we had done differently
- Ruminates: cows ruminate when they bring up food and chew it again. Humans ruminate when they bring up bad events and think them over again.

When we mind wander and think about the future we...

- Worry
- Catastrophise: we imagine a disaster (a catastrophe is going to happen)

Mindfulness is a strategy which can help us focus on now and stop mind wandering. The more mindfulness we practice, the more we learn not to mind wander.

This website provides lots of resources on mindfulness practices:

<https://www.mindful.org/how-to-meditate/>

## Sleep

The amount of sleep needed varies from person to person. A big factor in the amount of sleep a person needs is their age. For example, infants need to sleep for around 16 hours a day. Teenagers need on average 9 hours of sleep per night, and most adults require 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

### Scientific Health Benefits of Sleep

- Not getting enough sleep is linked to fat. Children are 89% more likely to be obese if they do not get enough sleep.
- Cortisol (the stress hormone) is associated with a lack of sleep
- Improves the immune system. It helps to fight off being sick. People who slept less than 7 hours a night are three times more likely to develop a cold than those sleeping 8 hours or more.
- Sleeping helps to improve learning.
- Good sleep lowers the risk of developing depression
- People who get more sleep, eat less
- Sleep helps us to empathise with others
- Sleep improves athletic performance

Strategies to help sleep	Things to avoid
Drop in temperature (hot bath before bed)	Too much heat (turn heat off, avoid heated blankets)
Focus on breathing	Napping in the day
Reading (as long as its not electronic)	Electronics (e.g. mobile phone)
Only use bedroom for sleep	Caffeine after 6pm
Keep to regular sleeping and rising schedule	Alcohol
Herbal tea (esp. chamomile, valerian, hops)	
Hot milky drinks (incl hot chocolate, Horlicks)	
Exercise (but not too close to bedtime)	