

WED: SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE

Fact Acting as if you are an extroverted person makes you happier, even if you are an introvert at heart, according to US research. So work on your confidence and happiness will follow.

Know this Picture someone in your life who makes you feel small. Now picture them half as tall and wearing a baby's nappy, says Dr Mark Atkinson, a doctor with a specialist interest in holistic medicine who's also the author of *The Mind-Body Bible* (Piatkus, £12.99). 'This humorous image will help to deactivate the negative feelings. Imagine yourself feeling relaxed with this person – and notice how much better you feel.'

Do this Walk with a sense of purpose, your head held high and your eyes looking directly ahead. Raise the corners of your mouth and breathe slowly. Then think of a friend you love and create a giant ball of happiness to send to them. Feel their happiness as they receive your gift and enjoy it as they return the favour. 'Changing your thoughts and your body posture are the keys to changing your state of mind,' says neuro-linguistic practitioner Rob Mesrie.

Make a note 'When you feel confident and happy, find a quiet spot, sit down and write a letter to yourself,' says Alyssa Abbey. 'Include messages about how capable you are, what's really important to you and reasons to stay motivated. Put it somewhere easy to access (stick it on a kitchen cupboard, your bathroom mirror or your diary) or alternatively give it to your partner and ask him to read it out to you whenever you need it.' Simply reading or listening to these positive and self-affirming words will give you an instant confidence hit.

THURS: STRESS

Fact 'There are many things that can cause day-to-day stress, such as self-appointed chores, saying "yes" too much or trying to be the perfect wife, mother or friend,' says Allison Kerry, spokesperson for mental-health charity MIND. 'Focusing on eliminating these pressures will help reduce tension and improve your wellbeing and happiness.'

Know this Panic breathing tends to be rapid and shallow, so try taking a few deep breaths, which is often enough to switch off your stress response, says Liz Tucker. 'Get into the habit of taking five minutes out, five times a day to enable your body to recharge.'

Do this Sign up as a volunteer. Over 60% of 25- to 34-year-old volunteers say that volunteering helps them feel less stressed, while 71% of volunteers who offer their professional skills and experience say it helps combat depression. Feel happier and help others – it's win-win!

Make a note Write down the five places you last walked. If most of them were in urban areas, resolve to take more walks in parks, the countryside or along the beach. Research by MIND found that 71% of people felt their mood improved after a 'green' walk while only 22% felt an urban walk had the same effect. →



“71% OF PEOPLE FELT THEIR MOOD IMPROVED AFTER A RURAL WALK. PLAN AN OUT-OF-TOWN TRIP TODAY”

7 day happiness PLAN

Can you become happier in just one week? Making small changes in each area of your life day by day will make a big difference – fast!

WORDS CATHERINE COOPER

MON: FRIENDSHIPS

Fact Friends are a vital part of happiness – economist Professor Andrew Oswald at Warwick University reckons it would take an extra £50,000 per year to make up for them.

Know this 'If your friend has an annoying habit, such as being late, don't seethe in silence – it's destructive to relationships and will make you unhappy,' says Alyssa Abbey, author of forthcoming book *Stop Making Excuses And Start Living With Energy* (Capstone, £10.99). 'Accept that they'll be late, take a book, have a coffee and enjoy some time alone while you wait. Or tell them that it upsets you when they're late and that you'd like them to make the extra effort to be on time in future.'

Do this 'When you've spent time with a friend, ask yourself whether you feel energised or drained. If you always feel deflated, ask yourself if it's time you moved on,' says Abbey.

Make a note Think of someone who's done something positive for you. Write 300 words about how that person touched your life, then read the letter to that person. US psychologist Professor Martin Seligman's says that this 'gratitude visit' leaves people feeling much less depressed and happier.

TUES: BODY IMAGE

Fact About 20% of women worry about their bodyshape at least ten times a day, according to research.

Know this When you think, 'I hate my hips/bottom/chunky thighs...' stop! Focus on a body part you like instead, such as your slender neck or shapely calves, and, if you can't, distract yourself. 'A negative thought can be a small panic response,' says Charmaine Yabsley, author of *The Happy Plan* (Collins & Brown, £12.99). Make yourself a cup of mint tea and sit outdoors in the sunshine – it will soothe a busy mind. 'Mint creates calm and allows stresses to fade away, leaving room for contentment and satisfaction,' says Yabsley.

Do this Bounce up and down on a trampoline, suggests health and wellbeing consultant Liz Tucker (www.behappybehealthy.co.uk). Bouncing on a trampoline makes for a great workout as it leads to improved posture, better muscle tone, greater co-ordination and elevated energy levels. 'It will also give you a natural high,' says Tucker, 'and make you feel like a child again. It's harder to be down about your body and focus on its faults when it's making you feel this good!' →

Photographs: KOT Syndication, foto-foto.com

