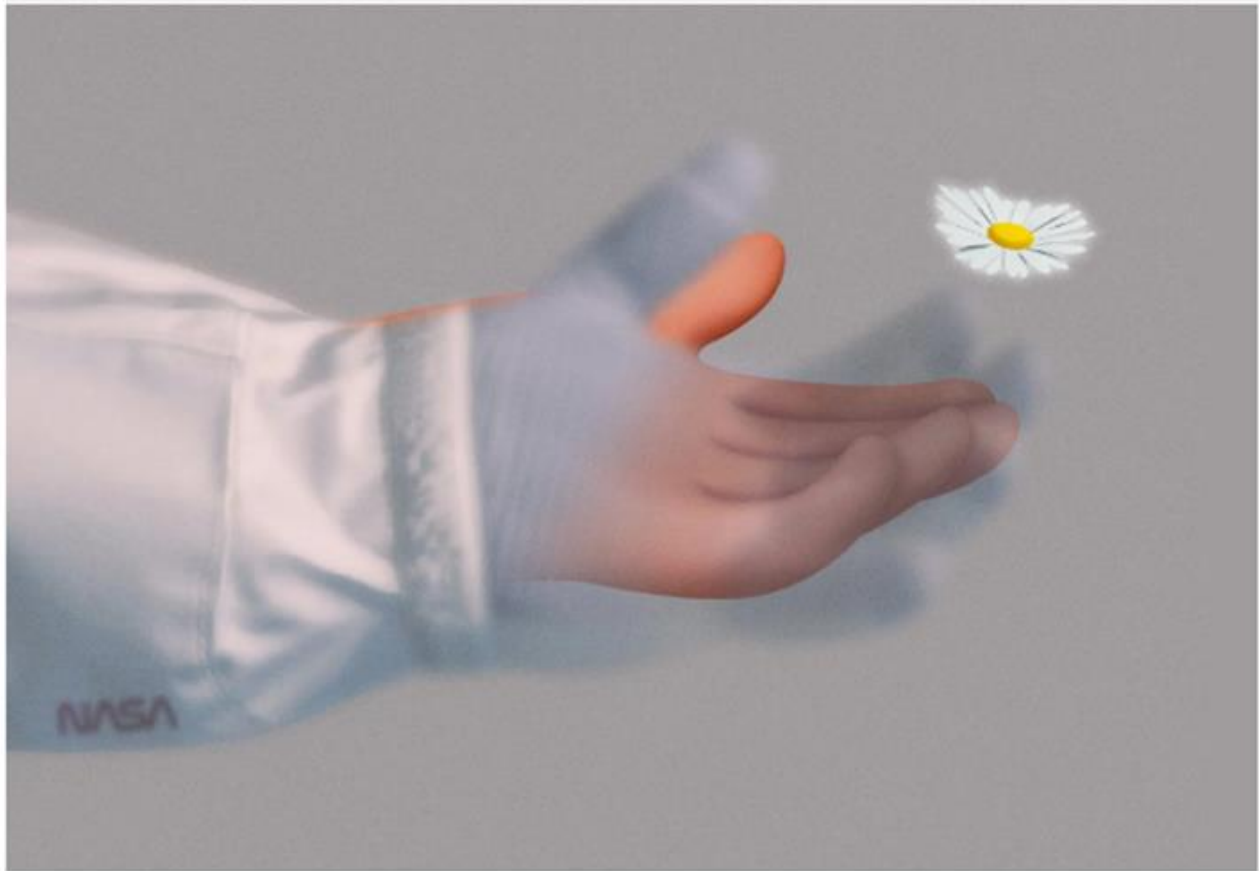


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How to Savor Life Like an Astronaut

You don't have to leave Earth to appreciate being alive. There are simple ways to cherish each day.



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Mike Massimino used to complain about the weather when he was growing up outside New York City. Then he went to outer space.

“In space, there is no weather,” he told me. “No atmosphere. No seasons. Nothing.”

And he missed it all. His new book, “Moonshot: A NASA Astronaut’s Guide to Achieving the Impossible,” is about what he learned as a veteran of two spaceflights. One big lesson was what he took for granted back home.

Now, even on the wettest, muggiest days, he enjoys the feel of rain on his face. “It’s a reminder that the planet is alive,” he said, “and how lucky I am to be on this planet.”

In other words, Massimino now takes the time to savor.

Savoring is the process of bringing mindful attention and awareness to the positive things in life, said Patrick R. Harrison, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who [researches the topic](#).

And making a habit of savoring everything from small moments, like holding your partner’s hand in a movie, to major life events like watching a child graduate from high school, can yield mental health benefits, from [increasing resilience](#) to [reducing stress](#).

You don’t have to go to outer space to appreciate the good parts of your life, though. Here’s how to do it.

Pause to notice details and sensations.

Try to fix a moment in your mind by labeling it, said Fred Bryant, a professor of social psychology at Loyola University Chicago who has researched savoring for nearly a half-century. Psychologists call this “encoding.” Tune into your senses, he said, and ask yourself: What positive sensations am I feeling right now? Why is this moment important to me? What do I see or hear?

“You can’t freeze a moment,” Dr. Bryant said. “But you can do the next best thing, which is to build a powerful memory of it.”

Dr. Harrison made an effort to label his experience when he recently became a father. While his wife was in labor, a nurse volunteered to hang up a string of twinkly lights in the hospital room.

“It was the middle of the night, and I noted how peaceful it was, and took in the soft glow of the lights, the warmth of my wife’s hand as I held it, how grateful I was to be with her in the room,” Dr. Harrison said.

Step out for a moment.

When Dr. Bryant realizes that he’s immersed in something that he should savor, like a birthday celebration, he will get up and leave.

“I will walk out of a restaurant and stand in the parking lot for a minute,” he said. He takes a moment to view the sight of his loved ones from a distance, then goes back in. Pulling back, even briefly, gives him instant perspective and deepens his appreciation.

I did this accidentally at a recent dinner with my parents. I went out to my car to retrieve my phone, and as I returned, I saw my folks, husband and kid laughing together in the dining room. Remember this, I thought.

Share good news.

If you receive happy news, Dr. Harrison said, contact a loved one and relish it together. This form of savoring is known as [capitalizing](#), and it can help prolong positive feelings.

I used to go on “[distress walks](#)” when I had problems. But now, when I get a bit of good news, I revel in it by going on a “savoring walk” and calling one of my sisters or a friend.

Practice ‘mental time travel.’

Savoring isn’t limited to experiences that are happening right now. You can also try something called “mental time travel,” Dr. Bryant said, by focusing on the future or the past.

Dr. Bryant amps up his appreciation for the present by imagining himself in the future, pining for his current life. He has a 7-year-old granddaughter, and sometimes he’ll pretend that she is all grown up, has moved away, “and that I would give anything, just for one more day with her,” he said. Then he opens his eyes and tells himself that his wish is granted.

“I’m seeing her later today,” he said.

For Massimino’s part, he makes a daily practice of savoring everything he missed in space. He loves going to ballgames, being surrounded by a crowd (“space can be incredibly lonely”) and hearing the sound of birds.

“I even like the sound of car horns now,” he said.