

10 Ways to Find Joy



1. **Every day, do something that reaffirms the beauty and joy of living.** Take time to look around and you'll find plenty of proof that beauty is everywhere. Have your morning cup of coffee in sight of the sunrise, or make it a point to see the sunset. Nature brims with the miracle of life -- get outside and soak it in. Walk through a park listening for birds, watch clouds in a robin's-egg-blue sky, go barefoot in lush grass, skip stones. Stop to smell those roses, and while you're at it, buy some fresh flowers for the house.

2. **Do something.** A feeling of helplessness in the face of tragedy or human need and suffering contributes to stress. Activity is therapeutic, and volunteerism is one of the best ways to give activity purpose. In helping others, you help yourself. Build a house for the less fortunate with Habitat for Humanity. Or look to Volunteers of America for many other opportunities to help others. Its programs serve some 300 communities across the country, with more than 30,000 volunteers annually doing all kinds of good, from delivering meals to the elderly to reading mail to residents of nursing homes. Or get active on a smaller scale -- there's a lot to be said for just practicing random acts of kindness. Recent research found that a "joy center" of the brain thrills more to unanticipated delights than to what's expected. So surprise someone with a little gift. The payoff for you is experiencing the joy of giving.

3. **Turn off the television and radio news.** Reliving the horror of 9/11 in documentary form can open old wounds. Choose instead to rent a feel-good movie or watch family videos you haven't seen in a while. Or pull out those scrapbooks and albums. Gather everyone around the stereo for an old-fashioned life-affirming radio show. Even just turning up some favorite old tunes can rejuvenate the spirit. Sing along!



4. **Get to know your neighbors.** A sense of neighborhood and community increases feelings of security and connectedness. Don't let the month of September become tainted forever, or allow loss and grief to steal your joy.

Welcome fall with new neighborhood traditions: Plan a block-party cookout or chili cook-off, organize a pre-holiday cookie exchange, or host a multifamily garage sale. It need not be anything elaborate. Share a batch of cookies with the folks next door or just sit on the front porch talking with the neighbors. Friendships develop in the details of daily living.

5. **Laugh.** It really is the best medicine, reducing anxiety, depression, and fear. In fact, studies show that laughter is one of the best ways to let out negative emotions without causing harm. Buy a funny book and chortle away, tell silly knock-knock jokes with the kids, invent a stupid pet trick, or rent a screwball comedy the whole family will enjoy. Grownups can check out *Amelie* (rated R), the heartwarming and funny French film that had all of France practicing anonymous acts of goodwill and kindness.

6. **Start and end the day on a positive note.** Your mother always told you to, and the advice is still great: Count your blessings. When you wake up, start your day with a thankful thought. Ditto at bedtime. If you feel down during the day, actually make a list of the good things in your life. Meditate, sing, practice yoga, light a candle -- find small positive rituals that center you with good thoughts and positive energy as you begin and close the day.

7. **Don't allow anger and rage to rule your life.** Misdirected anger isn't healthy. Consciously replace churning emotions with serene thoughts. Think of a particularly tranquil time at the ocean, or imagine yourself in a favorite soothing place. Find healthy ways to let off steam: exercise, make music, garden, paint, write out your thoughts in a journal. If you continue to feel overwhelmed or undermined, you can turn to prayer or professional assistance for help in handling upsetting feelings.



8. **Before you get out of bed in the morning, think of something that makes you smile.** Before you even brush your teeth, get your mental and visual focus on something that will warm your heart. Try putting a favorite picture -- hospital photos of your newborns, the brand-new kitten, a perfect moment on a family vacation -- on your bedside table. Look at it first thing in the morning. Starting off your day in a positive frame of mind will set your spiritual metabolism for the rest of the day. Smiles not only exercise muscles that fight frown lines, they actually boost your immune system.

9. **Be forgiving.** Forgiveness is an act of the will, an action you can take even when your heart and feelings seem to be lagging behind in bitterness. It might be impossible to forgive actual perpetrators, but you can hope and pray for transformation in them. In your own life, give up grudges and let go of old toxic memories. Reconcile with estranged friends and family members if you can, and commit yourself to giving others the measure of forgiveness you would like extended to you. Don't sweat small grievances.

10. **Nurture your family spirit.** We live in a different world now, a world that needs love more than ever. Show your commitment to those you love in word and deed. "I love you" means a lot, and so do the actions that make the words more than greeting-card sentiment. So say it, show it, and hug a lot. Strengthening family ties cultivates stability in your home. See and call out-of-town family and nearby relatives more often. That family feeling can grow well beyond your natural kin.

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