

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

You Don't Have to Win the Lottery to Enjoy Life

When was the last time you were annoyed by someone suggesting that you need to relax more and enjoy life? Maybe you thought, "If they had my job and my personal responsibilities, they'd have no time for enjoyment either!"
Actually, you're not alone in feeling there aren't enough hours in the day—many adults not only have trouble finding time for pleasure, but they have lost touch with the meaning of it.

Most of us have a shopping list of spectacular things we'd like to do, however focusing on activities that are out of reach is often a way that we deny ourselves the possibility of pleasure today.

Pleasure comes from having our mind and senses totally engaged. It's this absorption—the living in the moment—that frees our minds of anxiety, restores energy, makes us more productive and creative, and helps us feel more positive about our own self and others.

Most activities can be fun. What turns ordinary activities into simple pleasures is the attitude and attentiveness we bring to them.

While simple pleasures can certainly involve others, some of the most satisfying pleasures are those we can do alone—like taking a relaxing and soothing bath. At a time when people feel they have no control over so many things in their lives, solitary pleasures can give back some of that control in a healthy way.

Here's how to begin:

Think back to the things you enjoyed as a child. Was it playing in the garden (and getting your hands dirty)? Was it reading under the covers with a flashlight? Recalling some velvet memory from your childhood can help reawaken your desire for pleasure today.

Give yourself permission to enjoy, then build leisure time into your schedule the way you would plan for other activities. Some people feel uncomfortable with this notion. They may think of it as selfish or foolish, or worry that others will judge them unfavorably. If you can't seem to allow yourself time for pleasure or are concerned about the way others will perceive your leisure activities, talk it over with them directly or consider discussing it with a professional.

Realize that most free time comes in bits. Commuting to and from work may be an opportunity to listen to your favorite music. At work, consider turning a coffee or lunch break into a "pleasure break." At home, perhaps you can set aside 30 minutes after dinner or before bedtime to do something enjoyable.

Avoid the "all or nothing" approach. Part of appreciating simple pleasures is appreciating the expression "one step at a time". If you dream of having an elaborate garden, but lack the time or means to make it happen right away, then why not begin by purchasing a book about gardening, one that floods your eyes with color and fires your imagination? Even if all you can manage is one simple pleasure a week—or every two weeks—consider yourself successful. One hour of reading or one enjoyable walk at sunset is one more than you may have been enjoying before!

Take pleasure in anticipating pleasure, after all, anticipation is half the fun! If you're planning to sleep in on Saturday morning, why not think about making it a "mini vacation" with a great breakfast in bed, good book or video, or a pile of interesting catalogs and magazines?

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The thought of making changes in your lifestyle, especially those around attitude and behavior, can seem like an impossible process. By taking it one day at a time and using the tips above to get you on track, you'll be well on your way to making time for yourself and enjoying your life to the fullest.