



Creating a Savoring Ritual

BACKGROUND

When we contemplate the things that would make us happy, we tend to think of extraordinary and memorable events - going on a trip of a lifetime or a lottery win, for instance. Yet consistently noticing and savoring small, everyday positive moments can have a significant effect on happiness, resilience, well-being, and overall life satisfaction (Bryant, 2003; Quoidbach et al., 2010). Subjective well-being is not likely to be significantly improved by savoring only truly extraordinary positive events, which are often, by nature, rare and sporadic. Indeed, the *frequency* of positive experiences is a much better predictor of happiness than the *intensity* of those experiences (Diener et al., 2009).

Savoring is the capacity to notice, appreciate, enhance, and prolong the positive experiences in life, with deliberate attention to and awareness of positive emotions (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Jose et al., 2012). Increased awareness of pleasurable sensations lies at the very heart of savoring; when time is taken to notice and savor pleasant experiences, not only can we recognize positive emotions, but we can also fully appreciate them. Sensory-perceptual sharpening is a specific savoring strategy whereby one exerts efforts to be fully present at certain moments by deliberately directing attention to the pleasant experience (Bryant & Veroff, 2017). How people direct their attention during positive events has been found to influence their experience of positive emotions. For instance, research findings in the field of mindfulness, defined as the ability to fully present in the moment, have shown that increasing mindfulness can enhance the experience of positive emotions. In a study by Geschwind, Peeters, Drukker, van Os, and Wichers (2011), adults with a lifetime history of depression who received mindfulness training were found to experience momentary positive emotions more often, and they showed greater appreciation of and enhanced responsiveness to pleasant daily-life activities.

ACTIVITY

It is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that happiness is just around the corner. Many everyday positive experiences pass by without being noticed, appreciated, or enjoyed. *How can you respond to these good things in ways that emphasize their positive effects?* Savoring is a way to notice and enjoy positive experiences that are already present in our day-to-day lives. Making a conscious choice each day to notice and savor the things we like is an effective way to balance the negative effects of stress, promote resilience in the face of adversity, and increase positive emotions.

You do not need to wait passively for an extraordinary life event to occur to savor and enhance positive emotions. In reality, opportunities to savor pleasant experiences can be found almost anywhere, even while experiencing challenging life events. The number of positive experiences you have is much more critical than how special or exceptional those experiences are. In other words, it is more beneficial to savor those ordinary (yet pleasant) everyday activities rather than wait for extraordinary life events that do not happen very often.

The goal of this exercise is to help you stop, notice, enjoy, and prolong positive experiences that can be found in everyday activities.

Step 1: Identify everyday activities that bring you pleasure

This step is to get you thinking about the everyday things that give you pleasure. In other words, what do you look forward to on an average day?

Take a few moments to think about enjoyable activities that you can pursue and savor during an average day. These could include your morning cup of coffee, a hot bath, or a short stroll in the sunshine during your lunch hour. You should ensure that the activities are common sources of pleasure and enjoyment for you. List those activities below:

Step 2: Experience pleasure as it happens

You must choose to savor two enjoyable experiences each day for at least two weeks. These should be ordinary activities from your daily routine that you might typically rush through.

No matter what you choose to savor, focus on fully immersing yourself in the experience. Avoid outside distractions, turn off your cell phone, put everything else aside, and give the activity your complete attention. Slow down and notice and appreciate the positive aspects of the activity, paying close attention to and filtering out any thoughts that interfere with your savoring of this moment. If your mind begins to wander, simply bring your attention back to the positive sights, sounds, and smells around you.

Think of this step as a way to create a memory. Paying attention to your senses will help you savor the moment thoroughly and evoke pleasant memories of your experiences. Pay close attention to as many positive sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations as you can.

Use as many of your senses as possible. What do you see, smell, hear, feel, or taste? For instance, if you have chosen your morning coffee as one of your pleasurable experiences, try to pay attention to the smell of freshly ground coffee. What words would you use to describe this? *Rich? Sweet? Earthy?* Close your eyes for that first sip. Describe the sensation and taste in as much detail as possible.

Notice the pleasant surroundings and your positive feelings, and try to prolong the experience for as long as you can.

Step 3: Make time for reflection

At the end of each week, take some time to record your reflections on creating your savoring rituals. Recall as many of the positive emotions that you experienced and savored in the past seven days as you can. Write them down in the space below.

From the list above, which three positive emotions did you experience most often throughout the exercise?

Looking back over the past seven days, have you *noticed* more positive emotions compared to your typical week?

While savoring your chosen moments, did you feel your attention shifting away from the exercise? If so, what actions did you take to return your focus to the positive event?

When you think back on your savoring experiences, do you feel more appreciative of small moments of pleasure?

Did savoring make you feel more *aware* of the pleasant experiences that can be found all around you?

Did you find that savoring certain moments made these experiences more pleasurable than before?

What did you enjoy most throughout this exercise?

Did you find anything challenging throughout this exercise? If so, what?

Do you find yourself looking forward to savoring these activities in the future?

Did you share your experience with others? If so, how did this make you feel? How did others react?