

Capturing Enjoyment

Notice what is going through your mind while you do activities. If you are doing something that you thought would be enjoyable (like walking through a park), and yet you are thinking about negative things at every step, you are not likely to enjoy yourself. When you find yourself dwelling on negative things while you do activities, gently encourage yourself to focus on the activity itself and look for something to feel good about (pleasure, accomplishment, overcoming avoidance, acting on your values). Don't get discouraged if you keep returning to negative thoughts, because this is common in depression. You may need to pull yourself back to look for good parts of the activity hundreds of times each day. Being aware that you are drifting into negative thinking is a really good thing, because it gives you a choice to try to do something different.

Some people, especially those who have been depressed for a long time, have difficulty experiencing positive moods. If this is the case for you, try capturing very tiny positive experiences. A helpful strategy for many people who want to experience more enjoyment is to practice "capturing enjoyment." This involves not only doing activities, but actively looking for pleasure while you do them.

It often helps to start with noticing your sensory experiences (sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste). Pay attention to all five of your senses as you go through your day. Notice textures, sounds, smells, and sights that you find even a little bit enjoyable. When you eat something, savour the flavours that you taste. When you go outside, stop and smell the air, looking for any smell that might be pleasant. Feel the air on your skin. Is the temperature warm or cool? Listen for sounds that are interesting or pleasant, such as birds or even the sounds of an engine running. Look at the colours that surround you; notice people who seem pleasant or even humorous. It is helpful if you can experience even a tiny moment of positive reaction to something. Such tiny moments can be captured throughout the day.

Over time, it will become easier to experience positive moods more regularly and for longer periods of time. Get into a mind-set of savouring small parts of your experiences. Once you can do this, you can add layers to your enjoyment of activities by searching for positive aspects of your experiences. For example, you might enjoy overhearing a bit of a funny conversation, or having a friendly interchange with a clerk. When we deliberately make a choice to look for positives in our day, we've cracked a window open to allow positive experiences in. At the same time, when we are actively looking for positives, our minds are less focused on negatives.