



Dr Bruce Wells
the happiness expert

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Happiness Challenge

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PRACTISING HAPPINESS

What the Book is about in a Nutshell

The secret is in the title. Note that it does not refer to the pursuit of happiness, the quest for happiness, or the goal of happiness, but to the practice of happiness. Happiness is not a goal to be pursued, but rather a byproduct of a certain way of living your life. It involves getting out of your mind and living your life. Instead of appreciating the present we get lost in drifting off into daydreams, brooding about the past or worrying about the future, ruminating about our unsolvable problems, or trying to work out the meaning of life. When our mind wanders about like this we end up distracting ourselves from the present and happiness eludes us. We postpone it for another day.

The essence of the mindfulness approach to daily living involves practising fully inhabiting your life by learning, day by day and moment by moment, to first notice and then turn towards the present, with all its joys and discontents, nostalgia and regrets, plans and worries, thoughts and imaginings. You teach yourself to observe your present-moment experiences with acceptance and friendly curiosity. It is NOT a way to empty your mind, stop your thoughts or numb your feelings.

Benefits of Mindfulness

People who practise mindfulness feel less depressed and anxious and stressed, they learn to stay in touch with their true priorities, they handle their problems more effectively, they find peace of mind, their relationships are stronger, their physical health improves, they have more positive emotions, and they get more enjoyment from ordinary daily events.

Mindfulness teaches us that we are more than our thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings are like visitors – they come and they go. We enjoy some of them, we dislike some of them, but we learn from all of them. Most importantly, we learn that we don't have to ACT on our thoughts and feelings – we don't have to be controlled by them.

Psychological Traps

1. Rumination – negative, repetitive, prolonged, unhelpful thinking where we focus on previous difficulties, negative emotions, current problems, and imagined future misfortunes. It intensifies negative moods, interferes with motivation and concentration, increases blood pressure and heart rate, harms relationships, lowers self-esteem, and makes us more susceptible to depression and binge eating and alcohol abuse. **Mindfulness solution** – label the thought as rumination, redirect your complete attention to the activity you are involved in, when the thoughts return gently let them pass on by.

2. Avoidance – thought suppression or deliberately trying not to think about something. But the more we try to suppress or avoid them the more we think about them. Also relates to avoidance of situations, behaviours, and activities. Can be beneficial in the short-term but not the long-term. **Mindfulness solution** – recognise the thought, redirect your complete attention to the activity you are involved in, when the thoughts return gently let them pass on by.

3. Emotion-driven Behaviour – when we're upset or under stress we sometimes lose control and do things that we later regret because it temporarily relieves the intensity of our feelings. However, the behaviour is inconsistent with our long-term goals and so we suffer for it later. Emotions consist of 3 components including sensations in the body, thoughts in the mind, and urges/action tendencies to act in certain ways. **Mindfulness solution** – learn to observe emotional experiences without judgment and without acting on them in impulsive ways, mindfulness of urges gives us time to decide upon a wise response.

4. Self-criticism – criticism is helpful when it is constructive (mentions strengths and weaknesses, focuses on the work and not the person, is specific, and is respectful in tone). **Mindfulness solution** – label your thoughts as thoughts, greet them as passers-by, notice that it is the radio in your mind and you don't have to believe it.

Mindfulness Exercises

1. Identify and then follow your own values and goals in all areas of your life.
2. Mindful observation is self-directed, present-focused, and non-judgemental. Practise mindfully observing sounds, physical sensations, colours and shapes, smells, for example, when exercising, washing the dishes, and usual daily activities.
3. Mindful observation of breathing.
4. Mindful observation with labels – a sensation, a thought, an urge, an emotion.
5. Acting with awareness – raisin exercise.
6. Acceptance and willingness – body scan exercise + mindful pausing exercise.
7. Cultivating self-compassion – practise mindful exercises + self-care + savouring + self-soothing + self-validation
8. Remember that thoughts are just that and only that – thoughts.



Dr Bruce Wells is a happiness expert and professional speaker with a PhD in psychology and degrees in health promotion and physical education.

He has over 20 years' experience in the health and wellness industry in Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. He is a former school teacher, university professor, international tour guide, personal fitness trainer, and is the author of *Happiness Anywhere Anytime*.

Bruce regularly appears on Channel 9's Today show, various radio programs and regularly contributes articles to syndicated papers across the country. He is also a professional speaker delivering presentations to corporate and community health groups. For further details of his programs go to www.brucewells.com.au