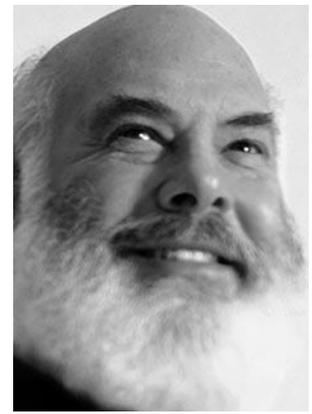


Andrew Weil's 4-Week Plan to Happiness



Holistic health pioneer Dr. Andrew Weil shares his secrets to finding happiness based on his own lifelong battle with depression.

Today 1 out of 10 Americans are taking some sort of anti-depressant drugs, a number that continues to grow. Dr. Andrew Weil, one of the gurus of holistic medicine and author of the new book, *Spontaneous Happiness*, addresses this epidemic by sharing the ways he has learned to manage his own lifetime battle with depression. Dr. Weil attributes two possibilities to the rise in depression and the use of prescription medications. First, some in the medical profession may be too quick to prescribe antidepressant drugs for ordinary states of sadness rather than looking at the totality of health concerns. Second, today's typical lifestyle, which includes more time indoors, less exercise and the likelihood of information overload, has altered brain function and made people more prone to anxiety and depression.

According to Dr. Weil, happiness arises spontaneously from within us; you can't find happiness from an outside source. In addition, it's unrealistic to expect to be happy all the time; it's normal to experience a range of moods and emotions – both positive and negative.

Based on his philosophy of integrative medicine, which incorporates the body, mind and spirit, Dr. Weil's 4-week plan to finding happiness can help you gain greater emotional well-being through simple lifestyle changes.

One final note: If you are suffering from depression, as diagnosed by a professional, this plan is not meant to be a substitute for medication or medical care, and you should consult your doctor before using it.

Week One

1. Cut Your Caffeine Intake

Caffeine is a strong stimulant that can affect mood and energy cycles and therefore aggravate depression. If you drink coffee or other forms of caffeine, try going cold turkey for two full days to see if you have a withdrawal reaction such as fatigue or a throbbing headache. If you notice that you are indeed dependent, you need to cut it out altogether. Try swapping coffee for oolong tea, which has less caffeine, and diet soda for sparkling water with lemon.

2. Cut Out Artificial Foods

Foods that are refined, processed and manufactured promote inflammation within the body, which can lead to chronic disease and also impair mood. Avoid packaged foods, especially all the snack stuff such as chips and cookie.

Today's supermarket shelves are stocked with tons of healthy and unhealthy foods. To make the right choices when walking the aisles, steer clear of the foods that can have disastrous long-term health consequences for your household.

Week Two

1. Add a Mood-Boosting Supplement Cocktail

- **Fish Oil:** Taking fish oil can dramatically improve mood and reduce depression. Take a supplement that provides 600 mg of DHA/EPA omega-3 fatty acids. If you're bothered by fish-flavored burps, try keeping the product in the freezer and swallowing frozen capsules. Be sure to take them on a full stomach.
- **Vitamin D:** Research shows that low levels of vitamin D correlate with mental disturbances and even psychosis. You may want to have your blood level tested to see if you're deficient. Take 1000 IU of vitamin D with your largest meal for optimal absorption.
- **Multivitamin:** Research suggests that adequate doses of three B vitamins – folate (or folic acid), B6 and B12 help ward off depression. Choose a multivitamin containing 400mcg of folic acid, 100 mcg of B12 and 1.7 to 2 mg of B6. Take with your largest meal to ensure absorption and avoid indigestion.

2. Reestablish Social Connections

Social connection protects people from depression. Today "artificial" interactions such as using social media have become substitutes for real interactions, which have diminished our sense of community. Relationships with family and friends are key to maintaining happiness. This week, work on reestablishing bonds with the people you care about and those you may have drifted from – powerful research shows that forgiveness improves mood. Also, build new connections

Week Three

1. Reduce Information Overload

If you don't create boundaries, it feels as if your workday never ends, and you never have any time, which impacts your state of mind. To ward off depression and anxiety, let your brain rest. Enforce a curfew starting at 8 p.m. and power down your cell phone, computer and television. Try this for one week.

2. Reconnect With Nature

Make an effort to get outside and reconnect with nature. It will help you unwind and eliminate distractions. You don't have to plan an excursion to a remote national park – it can be as simple as taking a walk through the park or along a nearby river or sandy shore. Just make sure to leave your cell phone at home (or in the car) so you can disconnect and fully engage in your surroundings.

Week Four

The first three weeks of this plan are based on setting the groundwork for strong emotional well-being. If you still feel like you need help, try these additional strategies:

1. Herbal Remedies

- **Ashwagandha:** Also known as Indian ginseng, this herbal remedy has anti-anxiety and mood-elevating properties. Ashwagandha is very safe and can be used long-term. If your depression is associated with anxiety, this is a good complementary remedy to try.
- **B. SAME (S-adenosylmethionine)** This supplement has the advantage of working within 24-48 hours and is quite safe. However, it can be somewhat stimulating and should not be used by people with bipolar disorder, nor should it be taken too close to bedtime. Use only the butanedisulfonate form in enteric-coated tablets, or in capsules. Try 400-1600mg a day on an empty stomach.
- **Rhodiola:** Also called arctic root, this herb promotes focus and concentration and has mood-elevating effects.