

The importance of happiness during difficult times



TIP SHEET



Dr. Laurie Santos knows a thing or two about happiness—and we aren't just referring to her positive energy. She's an expert on the science and psychology of wellbeing, sharing her findings with thousands through her wildly popular Yale University course, *The Science of Wellbeing*. And while it may sound counterintuitive, happiness is exactly what we need to get us through the stress of the pandemic and the uncertainty, fear and anxiety over the future.

In 2020, Dr. Santos shared her expertise at our annual [THRIVEx](#). In just one hour, Dr. Santos inspired us all to seek and embrace happiness as we navigate this time of change and unrest.

Here are her top seven insights from the field of positive psychology on happiness and how it can help us to overcome difficult situations like the ones we are facing as a society today.

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Happiness, and focusing on happiness, and working towards happiness is still important in these challenging times... The research suggests that the act of focusing on happiness can solve a lot of the practical problems that a crisis like this gives us.”

Dr. Laurie Santos, THRIVE_{EX}



1. "Happiness itself can bring about a lot of positive life circumstances. It can give us the tools we need to change structures and change situations in the world."

While we may feel a sense of guilt for being joyful while others are grieving, happiness is actually very important in challenging times. Focusing on our own happiness can give us the resilience we need to change situations both in our personal lives and on a larger scale.



2. "We can harness the toughness to experience the power of post-traumatic growth."

Difficult situations have the potential to make us stronger and may even make us happier in the long run. By surviving a particularly tough scenario, we learn to appreciate what is truly meaningful and important in life and better prepare us to face future adversity.



3. "If we want to be happier during times of stress, we need to use a special mechanism of protecting ourselves, and we can do that through social connection."

When used properly, technology has the power to keep us connected even when we are physically apart. [Loneliness and isolation](#) can have a major negative impact on both our mental and physical health, so embrace those Zoom happy hours and explore new ways to maintain relationships with family, friends and coworkers.

[Harness the power of social connection and achieve wellbeing goals through friendly, team-based challenges with VP GO.](#)



4. "The studies on happiness suggests that happiness comes not from self-care but from focusing on other people."

We hear a lot about self-care these days, but the reality is that truly happy people are what Dr. Santos refers to as "other-oriented." Helping others, especially during times of crisis, makes us feel good and gives us a sense of purpose. Not only are we boosting our mood by lending a hand, we are also working towards solving real problems, which could mean a better future for ourselves and others.



5. “If we want to be happier and if we want to protect our willpower and get more resilient and even improve our performance, we need to harness the power of gratitude.”

Gratitude might not be the first thing that comes to mind during a life-altering experience such as a global pandemic, being laid off or after the loss of a loved one, but acknowledging even the little things that we appreciate can improve our overall wellbeing and boost our emotional resilience. Not sure where to start? Dr. Santos recommends writing down 3-5 things that you’re grateful for each day.



7. “If we want to protect ourselves during tough times, we need to make room for healthy practices.”

When stress levels are high, it’s all too easy to skip a workout or two, make less nutritious choices at mealtimes or deprioritise our sleep. It can feel overwhelming to have to put this extra effort into “being healthy,” but the reality is that these are the times where we need it the most. Beyond our physical wellbeing, exercise is a great way to relieve stress and improve our mental wellbeing, a balanced diet can have mood-boosting benefits and getting the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep each night can keep us happier, more focused and improve our immunity. By maintaining these healthy habits, even when we just don’t feel like it, we are becoming us physically and emotionally stronger to deal with the current stressors and will be better equipped to handle difficult circumstances in the future.



6. “If we want to be happy, we need to find ways to be in the present moment, even if that present moment sucks.”

Mindfulness and meditation are powerful tools, especially when we’re living in a constant state of stress. Did you know that we spend 46.9% of our day with our minds wandering? By learning to truly focus on the present, we can be more productive and improve our sense of wellbeing by improving our stress response.



Resilience is a skill we can learn by focusing on the positives and allowing ourselves to be happy, even when times are tough. And the stronger we are as individuals, the stronger we are together. Dr. Laurie Santos reminds us that we can change the world by making small changes in the way that we perceive and react to challenges: “We don’t just need to use happiness and all of these tools to improve our own wellbeing. We can use these tools, in some sense, to make the world a better place...these tools are there not just to protect our wellbeing, but to give us the resilience we need.

Have you seen Dr. Laurie Santos’ THRIVEx keynote session *Managing Mental Health: Combatting the Hidden Threats of COVID-19*? You can check out the replay at any time!

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