

## FOCUS

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### 5 Scientifically-Proven Ways to Boost Happiness

Happiness is hot right now. You can't visit major blogs like The Huffington Post and MindBodyGreen without running into tips and tricks for harnessing well-being. That's uplifting, says Emma Seppala (www.emmaseppala.com), associate director of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University. But she says these blogs are missing one key ingredient: Facts. "A lot of those articles are *intuitively* true, but because of my background, I always look at an article like that and think, ground this in some data!" says Seppala, laughing. "I can't take it as seriously." Seppala has engaged her science background to create Fulfillment Daily (www.fulfillmentdaily.com), a blog that chronicles scientific data on well-being, focus, compassion, and meditation—with practical takeaways for readers. The

website launched in mid-June with a roster of psychologists and science journalists contributing posts. Here are some key things we're learning about happiness through science:

**Gratitude:** Science (www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0092656607001286) has found that gratitude can significantly increase your happiness, and protect you from stress, negativity, anxiety, and depression. Sometimes, it can seem like a single event can throw our entire day off and we can miss some of the more enjoyable parts of the day. With this awareness that our mind tends to cling to the negative, we can intentionally focus on the good parts of our day to offset this imbalance.

**Practice:** Keep a gratitude journal (www.fulfillmentdaily.com/10-habits-to-grow-a-

positive-attitude/). Write down 5 things you feel grateful for every day. Keep it simple and short. See how your attitude changes after a few weeks.

**Service/Compassion:** while we often feel burned out by our to-do lists and are stretched for time, science suggests that giving your time to someone else (www.mindful.org/news/feeling-busy-give-your-time-away) can boost your own sense of well-being. Seppala says compassion is a key to happiness because social connection is a major predictor of health (www.youtubecom/watch?v=WZvUppaDfNs). For instance, low social connection is worse than smoking and high blood pressure. When connection with others is present, it can boost mental and physical health and even increase immunity and longevity.

(Continued on page 2)



#### Inside this Issue:

**Having a Sibling  
Makes Boys  
Selfless** Page 2

**Peak Performance  
Tips for  
Athletes** Page 3

## 5 Scientifically-Proven Ways to Boost Happiness (continued)

**Practice:** Smile. Research ([www.emmaseppala.com/reading-bodies-touching-minds/#.U4-My16otfM](http://www.emmaseppala.com/reading-bodies-touching-minds/#.U4-My16otfM)) shows that when you smile (whether it's real or fake) you feel better, reduce stress, and also uplift others! How? Your smile activates the smile muscles ([www.fulfillmentdaily.com/5-easy-ways-to-make-a-difference-in-less-than-5-minutes/](http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/5-easy-ways-to-make-a-difference-in-less-than-5-minutes/)) in others.

**Play:** Idle play and games introduce something entirely different into the daily routine and studies have shown ([www.fulfillmentdaily.com/5-highly-productive-reasons-make-time-play/](http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/5-highly-productive-reasons-make-time-play/)) it can boost creativity, help us think outside the box, improve our health, and make us feel better.

**Practice:** Take time for play. Play with your kids, or even play like a kid. Try to see if you can't have a good laugh every day. Eat a cupcake. See Fulfillment Daily's list of tips ([www.fulfillmentdaily.com/40-simple-effective-tips-fond-joy-every-day/](http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/40-simple-effective-tips-fond-joy-every-day/)) for more small ways to bring joy into your day.

**Don't Chase Happiness.** By chasing happiness, we often chase it away ([www.fulfillmentdaily.com/want-happiness-science-says-stop-looking/](http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/want-happiness-science-says-stop-looking/)). Fixating on what we want to see in our lives and then ruminating afterwards when things don't go as planned can turn into a vicious cycle. In a series of new studies ([www.fulfillmentdaily.com/want-happiness-science-says-stop-looking/](http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/want-happiness-science-says-stop-looking/)), the more value people placed on happiness, the less happy they became. Additionally, another research project (<http://time.com/83487/the-new-science-of-happiness/>) reveals that happiness is driven by the frequency, not the intensity of positive emotions. When we aim for intense positive emotions, we evaluate our experience against a higher standard, which makes it easier to be disappointed.

**Practice:** Sit with negative feelings. Sadness ([www.mindful.org/in-love-and-relationships/working-with-emotions/the-importance-of-sadness](http://www.mindful.org/in-love-and-relationships/working-with-emotions/the-importance-of-sadness)) and negative feelings aren't necessarily something to be avoided. In fact, despair can

Can be the consequence of fighting it. Try to be gentle on yourself with this 7-minute loving-kindness practice ([www.mindful.org/mindfulness-practice/loving-kindness-practice-video](http://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-practice/loving-kindness-practice-video)) from clinical psychologist and mindfulness teacher Elisha Goldstein.

**Meditate.** "If you really want to be happy, it's a really good idea to meditate. Otherwise you walk around life reacting to everything and you're stuck in your patterns and you get caught up in your dramas," says Seppala. "Meditation's the way out, it's that simple." And if everyone's able to have more awareness and spaciousness in their minds so that they're able to enter relationships and work with more calm—i.e. not having your buttons pushed by absolutely everything that happens to you—then you're going to have much better results in your life.

**Practice:** Body scan meditation. Since you've probably been glued to your screen this afternoon, let's take a small and simple step in the direc-

tion of paying our body the attention it is due. Consider spending just a few minutes—every day, if you can—to notice your own physicality. Not to judge your body or worry about it or push it harder at the gym, but to be in it. Try the body scan meditation ([www.mindful.org/mindful-magazine/7-steps-to-relax-your-body](http://www.mindful.org/mindful-magazine/7-steps-to-relax-your-body)) from Mindful Magazine ([www.mindful.org/mindful-magazine](http://www.mindful.org/mindful-magazine)). You can also try Elisha Goldstein's 10 minute guided meditation ([www.mindful.org/mindfulness-practice/the-body-scan-practice](http://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-practice/the-body-scan-practice)) video.

Written by Stephany Tlalka, Associate Editor at Mindful Magazine. *This post originally appeared on Mindful.org*

[www.holstee.com/blogs/mindful-matter-2014-12/160007024-5-scientificall-proven-ways-to-boost-happiness](http://www.holstee.com/blogs/mindful-matter-2014-12/160007024-5-scientificall-proven-ways-to-boost-happiness)

## Oh Brother! Having a Sibling Makes Boys Selfless

A new study brings good news to all the brothers out there: Having a sibling is just as good for you as it is for your sister. That's surprising to family scholars because boys typically report that they benefit less than girls from peer relationships. "In our study, most relationships were not as important for boys as they were for girls," said study co-author Laura Padilla-Walker. "But the sibling relationship was different—they seemed to report relying on sibling affection just as much as girls

do. It's an area where parents and therapists could really help boys." Padilla-Walker and fellow Brigham Young University professor Jim Harper found that siblings uniquely promote the development of sympathy. A quality relationship with a brother or sister also increased teens' levels of altruism, also known as prosocial behavior. "Having a sibling you can count on seems to make a difference especially for prosocial behavior," said Harper. "Best friends make contributions but siblings still matter." The BYU researchers followed 308

pairs of teenage siblings for three years. The project measured their development and tracked the quality of their relationships with friend and family members. "This was the first siblings study to control for all these other important relationships," Padilla-Walker said. "We can say that siblings are uniquely important, which is encouraging." The message for parents is that helping their children have a positive relationship with each other

Will yield lasting rewards. Boys who have hostile relationships with a sibling were significantly more likely to have behavioral problems later on. But the researchers caution that just breaking up fights isn't enough. "The absence of conflict does not mean the presence of affection," Padilla-Walker said. "It's ok if siblings fight but help them get through that and have positive interactions."

Harper is the lead author of the study, which appears in the [Journal of Research on Adolescence](#).

## Peak Performance Tips for Athletes

**#1 Allow your kids to regularly “eat” the breakfast of champions: frustration and deprivation!** In today’s ADD, point and click generation, kids are used to getting what they want immediately, with no sweat, frustration, or heartache. Given this, they tend to develop the average attention span of a flea! Unfortunately, becoming a champion wherever your dreams may take you, requires a completely different headset. Champions NEVER become champions over night. The process is ALWAYS a long, arduous and frustrating one! There are always setbacks, hardships, and heartaches! These are the road markers that let you know that you are on the right path. If you can’t tolerate setbacks, if you don’t have the patience to hang in there through multiple failures, disappointments and plateaus, if you can’t learn to make frustration and delayed gratification your best friends, then you will NEVER achieve meaningful success! Parents: If you want to help your kids achieve lasting success in their lives both on and off the field then let them have their frustration and disappointments! Do NOT rush in and try to make them feel “better” when they have setbacks. Deprivation and disappointments will ultimately make them hungrier, more motivated and stronger! Not immediately getting what they want is actually GOOD for them. NEVER take their frustrations away from them. Making things “easier” for your kids in this way will eventually cripple them and foster their dependency. Remember, our kids are super resilient and temporary

deprivations and disappointments will “feed” them and ultimately fuel their drive towards success and happiness!

**#2 Being a winning parent** If your son or daughter plays competitive sports my advice to you is simple: Remember when they were first born and you held them in awe, when they were toddlers and you delighted in every simple discovery and developmental mastery that they progressed through, when you loved them unconditionally without the clutter, over involvement and distractions of sports and academic performance. When they were that age you wouldn’t have dreamed of asking them to perform for your love or approval. You loved them for the amazing miracles that they were. Love your children in a way that has nothing to do with their sport or how well they do. Do not make them perform for your love. Do not burden them with the responsibility of having to make you happy. Their sport should be just that! THEIR sport! It should be a source of joy and fun for them completely unburdened by the heavy weight of worry that they might be letting you down unless they perform to YOUR EXPECTATIONS!

**#Shaming & humiliating athletes is not in the job description of a good coach!** Yelling and embarrassing athletes who have bad performances is demotivating, emotionally abusive, and terribly misplaced! Sure, a coach should hold his/her athletes accountable for lackluster effort IN PRACTICE. If an athlete is dogging it, goofing around and not listening, get all over them! That’s your job! However, when an athlete falls apart performance-wise in a game/match/race, it is NOT because of lack of effort.

It is NOT because they are uncommitted. Athletes rarely if ever have bad performances in competition on purpose! Bad performances are most often a result, of an athlete over thinking and putting too much pressure on themselves to do well. If you focus too much on outcome or beating a particular opponent, then you will fall apart under pressure. If you as a coach are going to call an athlete out for something, know your athlete, and then have the decency, sensitivity and intelligence to do this in private! Build them up, while you’re yelling at them!

**#4 The secret to championship goal setting** Your goals and dreams should serve one purpose for you. They are meant to be a motivational tool to get you to work harder in practice. If you are using them to threaten yourself or to try to get a higher level of performance out of yourself then you are badly misusing them! Remember, the “serious” in your sport should be relegated to how hard and how often you work. Your “serious” should drive your work ethic in training and NOTHING ELSE! Bring that same “serious” and “now it really counts” way of thinking to a competition with you and you will end up continuing to choke and slump!

**#5 You are more than your performance** Being an athlete is only one part of who you actually are. You are also a son or daughter, big brother or

sister, student, mentor, parent, spouse, musician, worker, etc. So what really makes you a winner? Being a great athlete is a very shallow and narrow way to measure whether you’re a winner or not. Who you are as a person in the world, interacting with others is far more important to determine your real character and self-worth.

**#6 The true purpose of sports** if sports should teach us anything of value, it should be a vehicle to teach us to become better individuals. It should teach us to be humble and selfless, to put our own needs behind those of our team. It should teach us to be a good sport, to be honest and to play fair. It should teach us to respect our teammates and especially our opponents, and to see the latter as our partners in a mutual pursuit of excellence. Sports should teach us to set aside our egos and self-aggrandizing behaviors like bragging and putting others down. Sports should teach us to work hard for a worthy goal and to accept both victory and defeat with class.

**#7 The mark of a true champion** Anybody can feel confident and be positive when things are going great. It takes no special talent, discipline or grit to smile and feel motivated when you’re on top. However, the mark of a true champion lies in how you handle the down times. It’s in those times when you feel discouraged, hopeless and unmotivated that the seeds of true greatness reside. How you react to and manage your failures, disappointments, performance slumps and plateaus will ultimately determine whether you’ll be a success or a failure in anything that you attempt, on or off the playing fields.

(Continued on back page.)

## VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE, LLC

1201 South Main Street  
Suite 100  
North Canton, Ohio 44720

Phone: 330.244.8782  
Fax: 330.244.8795  
Email: [info@vistapcc.com](mailto:info@vistapcc.com)

Visit us on the web!  
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## Peak Performance Tips for Athletes (continued from page 3)

**#8 Being hard on yourself is a “losing game”** Putting yourself down when you fail or make mistakes will NOT make you a better athlete. ON THE CONTRARY! Responding to your failings with frustration and self-directed anger will only tighten you up and ultimately shut your game down. Playing angry in this way will get you performing at a small percentage of your potential. Instead, you need to learn to respond to yourself the way a good coach would. You have to be able to forgive yourself for your failings and mistakes. You have to learn to treat yourself with patience and kindness whenever you fail rather than impatience and meanness. Beating yourself up for your shortcomings will ultimately kill your motivation and joy of the sport and once you lose those two, you’re lost!

**#9 The four letter secret to success** Got a dream you want to turn into reality?

GREAT! Then, roll up your sleeves, shut your mouth and get to WORK!! Meaningful success on and off the field can only be yours if you are willing to tenaciously work for it! You’ve got to pay your physical dues in order to make it happen and when you’re done paying, then you need to pay some more!!

**#10 Athletes: What’s really important in sports** Winning is NOT really important. Being “better”/ranked higher is NOT what’s important. Being the starter or team star is NOT what’s important. What IS REALLY important is WHO you are and HOW you are in the process of the competition.



That is,  
Having CHARACTER,  
Being a TEAM PLAYER,  
LIFTING the level of your teammates’ play,  
Being HONEST & TRUSTWORTHY,  
Pursuing EXCELLENCE and WORKING HARD in everything you do,  
Being a LEADER, regardless of whether you are the captain or not,  
Meeting both VICTORY & DEFEAT with dignity and grace,  
Being a great ROLE MODEL, and  
Interacting with all others with RESPECT.  
That is what is REALLY IMPORTANT in sports!

Source: Dr. Alan Goldberg: Sports Psychology and Mental Toughness Newsletter  
[www.competitivedge.com](http://www.competitivedge.com)  
Competitive Advantage, 226 Strong Street,  
Amherst, MA 01002