



# HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON  
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO WIN THE LOTTERY TO ENJOY LIFE!

When was the last time you were annoyed by someone suggesting that you relax more and enjoy life? Maybe you thought, "If they had my job and my personal responsibilities, they'd have no time for enjoyment either!"

Actually, you're not alone in feeling there aren't enough hours in the day. Many adults not only have trouble finding time for pleasure, but they have lost touch with the meaning of it.

Most of us have a shopping list of spectacular things we'd like to do. "But focusing on activities that are out of reach is often a way that we deny ourselves the possibility of pleasure today," says Warren Shepell's Montreal counsellor, Diane Labonté.

She and other experts say that pleasure comes from having our mind and senses totally engaged. It's this absorption - the living in the moment - that frees our minds of anxiety, restores energy, makes us more productive and creative, and helps us feel more positive about our own self and others.

Most activities can be fun. "What turns ordinary activities into simple pleasures is the attitude and attentiveness we bring to them," says Olga Michie, a Toronto-based counsellor for Warren Shepell.

While simple pleasures can certainly involve others, some of the most satisfying pleasures are those we can do alone - like taking an invigorating shower, followed by a brisk rubdown with a plush towel, then using some soothing talc or body lotion.

Says Michie, "At a time when people feel they have no control over so many things in their lives, solitary

pleasures can give back some of that control in a healthy way."

Here's how to begin:

- ▲ Think back to things you enjoyed as a child. Was it playing in the garden (and getting your hands dirty)? Was it reading under the covers with a flashlight? Recalling some velvet memory from your childhood can help reawaken your desire for pleasure today.
- ▲ Give yourself permission to enjoy, then build leisure time into your schedule the way you would plan for other activities. "Some people feel uncomfortable with this notion. They may think of it as selfish or foolish, or worry that others will judge them unfavourably," says counsellor Labonté. If you can't seem to allow yourself time for pleasure or are concerned about the way others will perceive your leisure activities, talk it over with them directly or consider discussing it with your EAP counsellor.
- ▲ Realize that most free time comes in bits. Commuting to and from work may be an opportunity to listen to your favourite music. At work, consider turning a coffee or lunch break into a "pleasure break." At home, perhaps you can set aside the 30 minutes after dinner or before bedtime to do something enjoyable.
- ▲ Avoid the "all or nothing" approach. Part of appreciating simple pleasures is appreciating the expression "one step at a time." If you dream of having an elaborate garden, but lack the time or means to make it happen right away, then why not begin by purchasing a book about gardening, one that floods your eyes with colour and fires your imagination? "Even if all you can manage is one simple pleasure a week - or every two weeks - consider yourself successful," says Michie. "One hour reading or one enjoyable walk at sunset is one more than you may have been enjoying before!"

- ▲ Take pleasure in anticipating pleasure. After all, anticipation is half the fun! If you're planning to sleep in on Saturday morning, why not think about making it a "mini vacation" with a great breakfast in bed, good book or video, or a pile of interesting catalogues and magazines?
- ▲ Gradually involve others. As you master the art of enjoying simple pleasures, why not let others in on the fun? Swapping jokes, telling ghost stories or tossing a ball with children may be a far more valuable gift than buying something from a toy store. The simple pleasure you share might become their "velvet memories" years from now.
- ▲ Virtual Reality without the computer. "With practice, you can get really good at this technique in only 60 seconds," says Olga Michie:
  - ▲ Close your eyes and visualize a pleasant scene (a beach for example).
  - ▲ Use all five senses to experience the scene. See the water, the cliffs, the cloud patterns in the sky. Listen to the waves washing on to the shore, smell the salt air. Quench your thirst with a drink of cool water. Now feel the gentle wind, the warm sun, and the sand on your skin. Okay, so you don't like the feeling of sand between your toes. Edit it out - after all - you're the author, editor, and producer of your happiness!

## TAKE A "PLEASURE INVENTORY"

Source: You Don't Have to Go Home From Work Exhausted, Ann McGee-Cooper, Bantam Books

Write down things that are fun for you. Use the following categories to list things by how long they take to do:

- ▲ 2-5 Minutes
- ▲ 5-30 Minutes
- ▲ 30 Minutes - ½ Day
- ▲ ½ Day or More

Now, count and review each item on the list. You might be interested to know that most busy adults run out of ideas after they've thought of ten to fifteen activities, but ten-year-old children have easily generated 55 ideas in the same amount of time!

Count up how many ideas you have that take 30 minutes or less and how many take half a day or more. What does this tell you about your ability to enjoy simple pleasures?

## SIMPLE PLEASURES IN 10 MINUTES OR LESS

- ▲ Any hobby or craft that you readily pick up and put down such as whittling, needlework or single-handed card games.
- ▲ Playing with a toy such as Silly Putty, a paddleboard, kaleidoscope or yo-yo. If you're courageous, go in-line skating around the block.
- ▲ Doodling or sketching.
- ▲ Word games such as crossword puzzles or try writing down as many words as you can find from, say, the word "playfulness."

Any changes a person makes to their lifestyle, especially changes regarding an attitude, will not be an easy process for most people. It is our hope that something in this piece will be a helpful suggestion to you. And we do know that sometimes it is easier to decide what to do when making a decision (especially one regarding changing an attitude) after speaking about it with someone else. An EAP counsellor is one person who can encourage you to enjoy life and help you find your inner fun!

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

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