GoalTodo

# How to be happier: three small things, one week at a time

## Be happier

14 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Mar 7

# Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

## Notice what makes a good day

Find your three

- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head. This week, write it down
  1 minute
- [ ] At the end of the week, read your notes. Write down three things that make a good day for you. Keep each one to an hour or less and cheap or free, such as a walk with a friend, cooking a meal you like, or an hour in the park

**Done when:** You've noted a good moment on most days and written down your three things

**Sticking point:** Some days nothing seems good. The moment can be small: a hot drink, a song, a message from someone. If you're stuck, use the steps in the guide as prompts, or think of what used to make a good day for you. If most days have felt empty for two weeks or more, read the guide's section on low mood.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

## Your first good-day thing

One a week

- [ ] Choose one of your three and put it in your week: a day, a time, and who's coming if it needs someone
- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done one of your three things, on or close to the day you planned

**Sticking point:** Waiting until you feel like it is the usual reason a week slips. If the day comes and your energy is low, do a smaller version. Ten minutes still counts.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

## Bring someone in

One a week

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Get in touch with one person you haven't seen or spoken to for a while. Call them or meet up, rather than only sending a message
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and spent time with, or called, one person

**Sticking point:** Getting in touch after a long gap can feel awkward. Keep it simple: say you were thinking of them and ask how they are. If you'd like more people in your life, not just more contact, the Make a new friend plan takes it step by step.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

## Something kind

One a week

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Do one small kind thing: thank someone for something they did for you, offer to help with a job, or ask someone how they are and really listen to the answer
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and one kind thing for someone else

**Sticking point:** Kindness doesn't have to be big or planned. If nothing comes to mind, a specific thank-you to someone who helped you recently is enough.

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

## A month, and a check

One a week

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Read your notes from the past four weeks. Next to each of your three things, write how it went and how you felt afterwards. If one isn't working, swap it for something else
  10 minutes
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done one of your three things every week for four weeks, and checked your list

**Sticking point:** If none of your three seem to help, that's useful to know, not a failure. Swap one for a step from the guide you haven't tried. If your mood has stayed low for more than two weeks, talk to a doctor: see the guide's section on low mood.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

## Move, outside

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Go for a walk, or another activity you enjoy, outdoors. Notice what's around you: trees, birds, the sky, the weather
  20 minutes
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and spent 20 minutes moving outside

**Sticking point:** Bad weather. Dress for it and go anyway, even for ten minutes. A park or a street with trees is enough. If you liked it, Walk every day and Spend more time outdoors build on it.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

## Learn something small

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Try something new for about half an hour: cook a recipe you haven't made before, fix something that's broken, or try a hobby you've been curious about
  30 minutes
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and tried one new thing

**Sticking point:** Being bad at something new is part of learning it. It doesn't have to lead anywhere, or end in a qualification.

Jan 18–24
Week 8

## A plan for hard weeks

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] For each of your three things, write a small version you could do in ten minutes on your worst week: a call instead of a visit, a walk round the block instead of a long one
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and written a small version of each of your three

**Sticking point:** If a week goes wrong, the small version keeps the habit going. A small one done is better than a big one skipped.

Jan 25–31
Week 9

## Slow it down

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set. Give it your full attention: what you can see, hear, smell and feel. When your mind drifts to other things, bring it back
  up to an hour
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head. Before you write, spend a minute going back over the moment in your mind
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing with your full attention, and noted a good moment on most days

**Sticking point:** Your mind will wander to the to-do list. That's normal. Notice it, and come back to what you're doing. For a daily practice of this, see the Meditate every day plan.

Feb 1–7
Week 10

## Check the basics

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Look back over your notes. On your better days, had you slept well? Got outside, moved, seen someone? Write down one basic thing you'd like more of
  10 minutes
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and written down one basic you'd like more of

**Sticking point:** If sleep keeps coming up, the Be asleep by 11 plan moves your bedtime earlier a little at a time. Change one basic at a time, not all of them.

Feb 8–14
Week 11

## One good thing, in detail

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Write about one good thing from the past week in detail, ideally a person: what they did, and why it mattered to you. If you can, tell them
  10 minutes
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done your good-day thing and written one detailed entry about something good

**Sticking point:** A long list of good things soon feels like a chore. One thing written about properly does more. The Keep a journal plan has a weekly entry like this if you want to keep it up.

Feb 15–21
Week 12

## Your own week

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] If you have room, do a second of your three things this week. It's optional
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done at least one of your three things this week

**Sticking point:** More isn't the goal. If one a week is what fits your life, the plan is working.

Feb 22–28
Week 13

## Three months

Keep it weekly

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've done one of your three things every week for twelve weeks

**Sticking point:** If you missed a week or two along the way, you haven't failed the plan. Count what you did, not what you missed.

Mar 1–7
Week 14

### Keep what worked

Look back

- [ ] Do one of your three good-day things, on the day you set
  up to an hour
- [ ] Read back through your notes from the whole plan. Next to each of your three things, and each thing you tried, write keep, change or drop
  20 minutes
- [ ] Write your list for the next three months: up to three things, your day for them, and the small version of each for hard weeks
- [ ] Each evening, note one good moment from today: what happened, and who you were with or what you were doing. Write one line, or replay it in your head
  1 minute

**Done when:** You've written your list for the next three months and set the day for your next good-day thing

## Milestones

| | |
|---|---|
| Mon, Nov 30 | Note one good moment |
| Sun, Dec 6 | Write down three things that make a good day |
| Sun, Jan 3 | Do one of them each week for a month |
| Sun, Feb 28 | Each week for three months |
| Sun, Mar 7 | Look back and keep what worked |

## How the plan works

To be happier, do more of the small things that make your good days good, and do them on purpose, every week. For most people that isn't one big change. It's ordinary things done more often: time with people, moving your body, learning something, doing something kind, and paying attention to the moment you're in. The NHS calls these the 5 steps to mental wellbeing, and research on happiness adds being outdoors, enough sleep and gratitude.

The plan has three parts:

- Find your three. In week 1 you write down three things that make a good day for you. Small ones: things you can do in an hour or less, for little or no money.
- Do one every week. You put one of them in your week, on a set day, and do it, for a month and then for three months. Most weeks also bring a small try from one of the steps below, to see whether it belongs on your list.
- Look back. In the last week you read back over your notes, keep what worked and drop what didn't.

Each evening you also note one good moment from the day, in a line or just in your head. It takes a minute.

This isn't about feeling happy all the time. Nobody does, and it isn't realistic or healthy to expect to. Sad, worried or angry days are part of a normal life, and they often tell you something needs to change. The aim is more good days, not no bad ones.

The milestones count from the first day of week 1: your first good moment is day 1, your list of three is done by day 7, a month of weekly good-day things is done by day 35, three months is day 91, and the look back is

the last week, by day 98. On the "I know what helps but rarely do it" level you start doing your good-day things in week 1, so your month of them is done a week sooner, by day 28.

# Which level to pick

▪ I'm not sure what makes a good day: you'd struggle to name three things that reliably lift your day, or life has been busy enough that you've lost track. Week 1 is a week of noticing before you write your list.

▪ I know what helps but rarely do it: you can already name things that make a good day, such as seeing a friend, a swim or an afternoon outside, but they don't happen often. You write your list on day 1 and start straight away.

Both levels last 14 weeks. If you're not sure, pick the first: a week of noticing makes a better list.

# Before you start: when it's more than an off patch

Everyone has low days, and a low mood often gets better after a few days or weeks. Small changes, like the ones in this plan, can help. But this plan is not a treatment for depression, and you don't have to sort out how you feel on your own.

See a GP or doctor if:

▪ your mood has been low for more than 2 weeks

▪ you've stopped enjoying things, feel hopeless, or can't concentrate on everyday things

▪ you're struggling to cope

▪ the things you're trying yourself, including this plan, aren't helping

A low mood that lasts 2 weeks or more can be a sign of depression. It isn't something to push through alone, and it's a fair reason to see a doctor. In England, if you are 18 or over, you can also refer yourself to NHS talking therapies without seeing a GP first. In the US, start with your primary care provider.

If you're thinking about harming yourself or ending your life, get help now. A mental health emergency is as serious as a physical one, and you won't be wasting anyone's time.

▪ UK: call 111 and choose the mental health option, or in Northern Ireland call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000. Call 999 or go to A&E if a life is at risk or you can't keep yourself safe. You can talk to Samaritans on 116 123.

▪ US: call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or chat at 988lifeline.org. Call 911 if a life is in danger.

▪ Australia: call Lifeline on 13 11 14, 24 hours a day, or 000 in an emergency.

▪ Anywhere else: call your local emergency number.

This plan can sit alongside treatment, not instead of it. If you're seeing a doctor or therapist, tell them what you're trying.

# What makes a good day

Use these as prompts when you write your three, and as the small tries in the weekly plan. You don't need all of them. Pick what fits your life. What works is different for everyone, and it can take some trial and error to find yours.

▪ Connect with people. Good relationships matter for wellbeing, and social connection is one of the strongest findings in happiness research. Have lunch with someone, call a friend you haven't seen for a while, or eat together at a set time. Don't rely on messages alone. If you'd like more people in your life, see Make a new friend.

▪ Be active. Being active can lift your mood and your self-esteem. You don't have to spend hours in a gym: find something you enjoy. A daily walk is an easy start: see Walk every day.

▪ Get outside. People who feel more connected to nature tend to have more positive feelings and more satisfaction with life. A park, a river or a garden all count. Spend more time outdoors builds this into your weekends.

▪ Learn something. Learning can build confidence and a sense of purpose. It doesn't have to mean a course or exams: cook something new, fix something, try a hobby.

▪ Give. Small acts of kindness help: thank someone, ask how someone is and really listen to the answer, help with a job, or volunteer.

▪ Notice the present. Paying attention to what's around you, and to your own thoughts and body, can help you enjoy life more. A minute of noticing on a walk or over a cup of tea is a start. For a daily sitting practice, see Meditate every day.

▪ Sleep. Less sleep is linked to lower happiness. If late nights are the problem, Be asleep by 11 moves your bedtime earlier a little at a time.

▪ Gratitude. Remind yourself of good things, and be specific. Writing about one good thing in detail, once or twice a week, does more than writing a list every day. Keep a journal has a weekly entry like this.

# What you need

▪ Somewhere to write: a small notebook, a card or the notes on your phone. One line a day is all it takes.

▪ Your list of three, somewhere you'll see it.

▪ A weekly slot: a day and time for your good-day thing, in your calendar like any other plan.

▪ Very little money. Most of what makes a good day is free or cheap. Pick things that are.

# Common mistakes

▪ Expecting to feel happy all the time. Good feelings come and go. A hard day doesn't mean the plan has stopped working.

▪ Forcing it. Telling yourself to look on the bright side, or putting on a happy face in a bad situation, tends to make things worse, not better. Let a bad day be a bad day.

▪ Picking big things. A holiday isn't a weekly habit. Pick things you can do in an hour.

▪ Doing everything at once. Set small targets you can reach. One good-day thing a week is the plan.

▪ Waiting until you feel like it. Put it in your week anyway. On a low day, do the small version.

▪ Turning the daily note into a long list. One moment, noticed properly, is enough.

▪ Using alcohol, gambling or drugs to lift a low mood. They can all make your mental health worse.

▪ Keeping it to yourself when you're struggling. Talk about how you feel to a friend, someone in your family or a doctor.

# Keeping it up after three months

After the look back there are no new weekly tasks. Keep these going:

▪ Your list of three, updated with what you learned.

▪ One good-day thing a week, on your set day.

▪ One good moment each evening, if it helps you.

▪ A look back every three months. Swap anything that's stopped working for something new.

What makes a good day changes as your life does, so expect the list to change too. In a hard patch, the small version of one of your three still counts. And if your mood drops and stays down for more than two weeks, that's the time to talk to a doctor, not to try harder on your own.

# If you fall behind

**Missed 1 week:** Missed a week? Do your good-day thing this week as normal and carry on from where you are. Don't try to fit two in to catch up.

**Missed 2 weeks:** Repeat the week you stopped on. Use the small version of your good-day thing if that's easier, then carry on.

**Missed 3 weeks:** Look at your list of three before you restart. If one of them is why you stopped, because it costs too much, takes too long or needs someone who isn't free, swap it. Then repeat the week you stopped on.

**Missed 4 or more weeks:** Start again at the first week with a good-day thing in it: week 2 if you weren't sure what makes a good day, week 1 if you knew. Rewrite your list if it needs it. If you stopped because your mood dropped and has stayed low for more than two weeks, not just because life got busy, talk to a doctor too.

# Sources


**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/`
“Evidence suggests there are 5 steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/`
“Good relationships are important for your mental wellbeing.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/`
“Paying more attention to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing.”

**Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley**
`https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/happiness/definition`
“In short, happiness in life is a worthy aspiration, and there are benefits to feeling happy—but it’s not realistic or healthy to expect a constant stream of positive emotions.”

**Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley**
`https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/happiness/definition`
“Perhaps the dominant finding from happiness research is that social connections are fundamental.”

**Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley**
`https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/happiness/definition`
“People who are more connected to nature tend to experience more positive emotions, vitality, and life satisfaction.”

**Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley**
`https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/tips_for_keeping_a_gratitude_journal`
“Writing occasionally (once or twice per week) is more beneficial than daily journaling.”

**National Institute of Mental Health (NIH)**
`https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health`
“Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for.”

**National Institute of Mental Health (NIH)**
`https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health`
“It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you.”

**National Institute of Mental Health (NIH)**
`https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health`
“If you have concerns about your mental health, talk to a primary care provider.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/low-mood-sadness-depression/`
“A low mood often gets better after a few days or weeks.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/low-mood-sadness-depression/`
“It's usually possible to improve a low mood by making small changes in your life.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/low-mood-sadness-depression/`
“If you have a low mood that lasts 2 weeks or more, it could be a sign of depression.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/`
“Get help from 111 online or call 111 and select the mental health option.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/`
“A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one.”

**NHS**
`https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/`
“You will not be wasting anyone's time.”

**National Institute of Mental Health (NIH)**
`https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression`
“If you or someone you know is struggling or having thoughts of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org.”

**healthdirect Australia**
`https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-health-helplines`
“If you need urgent medical help, call triple zero (000) immediately.”

**healthdirect Australia**
`https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-health-helplines`
“You can also call Lifeline on 13 11 14 — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.”

**Minding Your Head (Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland)**
`https://www.mindingyourhead.info/lifeline`
“Lifeline is Northern Ireland’s crisis response helpline for people experiencing distress or despair.”

**Minding Your Head (Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland)**
`https://www.mindingyourhead.info/lifeline`
“If you need support now phone Lifeline on 0808 808 8000”

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|---|---|
| **This plan online** | `https://goaltodo.com/be-happier` |
| **Reach it with others on Welang** | `https://welang.com/goals/be-happier` |
| **Reach it on your own in HourLife** | `https://www.hourlife.com` |

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.