

My "How to Live an Amazing Life" List

September 28, 2020

I'm so glad that you are reading this because it means you are clearly ready for positive change in your life. My goal as a psychologist is to make the world a better place one person at a time. You are one of those people. Below are various suggestions on things that I know help people to live much better lives.

Breathing: I decided to put this first because it is one of the therapeutic skills that I teach that my clients have said helps them the most. Breathing in a healthy manner is the most powerful, effective, quick and easy to use method for improving mental health. If you master your breath you can master your life. I would suggest learning how to breathe deeper and release negative feelings, thoughts, and emotions particularly with the exhale. You can click here to visit my emotional release techniques called "Changing Gears".

Put good things in your head: Knowledge is not only power it is healing. I find listening to good podcasts and watching inspiring videos on youtube to be quite enjoyable and useful. You can click here to see my recommended booklist.

Diet: Unhealthy diets poison the body and makes everything that much harder because your body is in an activated state of survival which means you are wasting valuable resources and you are likely in an activated state of fight/flight/freeze (irritability, anxiety, or depression). Cleaning up your diet will make your life much easier. It does for me.

Decrease Caffeine (and other substances): The reason that I am highlighting caffeine is because people tend to understand the drawbacks of other substances, but don't realize how anxiety, irritability, and feeling stressed can be related to caffeine. I highly recommend doing your own personal experiment where you wean yourself off of the caffeine for a period of time and see how you feel. You will probably notice a difference, but even if not the people around you likely will.

Exercise: I would also suggest trying some basic exercise at least once per day. I particularly suggest walking at least 30 minutes, yoga, running, swimming, and/or weightlifting in particular. Find an activity that feels fun, do it with a friend, and schedule to help ensure success.

Meditation: I would suggest meditating at least a minute per day. This builds healthy commitment and habit that you can apply to other areas of your life. I would suggest doing more than a minute on the second day and then adding a bit day by day. It does get much more enjoyable and easier the more you do it. Headspace and Calm are excellent beginner's app for meditation, calming the mind and nervous system, and they are free.

Socialization: We are social animals and healthy hormones, particularly oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine) are released when we are in the presence of safe others that we are connected to. Studies show that quality is much more important than quantity of relationships. They suggest that having a couple of good friends is all that is needed to make a major difference in how people feel.



Sleep: This is one area where most people in the U.S. are lacking. Studies have found that over 30% of adults do not get enough sleep. Disrupted sleep is significantly correlated with depression, stress, bi-polar disorder and many other mental health issues.

Mindfulness: Looking outward rather than inward: If you think back on the times that you have felt good in your life and have felt some degree of flow, you will notice that you were primarily focusing outward. When you reflect back on the times that you were most anxious, depressed, etc. you were very inwardly focusing on the self. The more that we can be present in our life the more that we tend to be ourselves in a healthy manner.

Doing things for others: Here are some therapeutic benefits for doing things for others: Improves mood and decreases mental health issues Increases social connection and sense of belonging Helps you live longer, decreases pain, and lowers blood pressure. What goes around comes around. The more you give the more you get. Increases overall life satisfaction

Paying on the front end: If we eat our vegetables first we will tend to get a lot more dessert, but if we eat our dessert first then we will have to eat a lot more vegetables later on. OK.. maybe it isn't the best metaphor, but what I find is that when we put effort in early that it pays off later. One example is couples who don't spend time learning to communicate will spend much more time in arguments and then trying to repair the damage that was done. The same goes for diet, exercise, etc.

Recharging your batteries: We live in a culture where we are doing things constantly and our mind is chattering away like a hamster in a wheel. Each of these thoughts and activities are draining our bodies, which have evolved to rest much more than we do. Think about it, we are animals and have basically the same biological systems as all other animals on this planet. Now ask yourself the question what percent of the time are all other animals at rest, play, grazing, sleeping, etc. My guess is around 90% of the time. How much time are you spending on these activities? I'm sure much less.

Teaching others what you have learned: The way to learn best is to teach. I suggest that whatever you are learning to better your life, that you share with others. This way you help spread good information as well as deepen your understanding of it and start moving it into your identity where it becomes a part of you.

I am glad that you got to the bottom of all of these recommendations and ramblings. This suggests to me that you are really invested in improving your life. Feel free to contact me if you would like to work on any of these areas.