

CHOOSE A LIFE WITH MEANING



CHOOSE TO HAVE PURPOSE

Looking after ourselves is only the beginning, and provides a stepping stone towards choosing a life with meaning.

Choose to have purpose

In the same way that we need to give to ourselves in order to give to others, a meaningful life doesn't stop with just looking after ourselves—this is only the beginning, and provides a stepping stone towards choosing a life with meaning.

Below is an Action Plan for Giving³, starting with the stepping stone of 'self' and extending from there to the widening pool of others, communities, the natural environment, and ultimately, to something 'bigger' than ourselves.

Action Plan for Giving

Self	We must first learn to give to ourselves to create a surplus from which to give to others. Refer to the SELF CARE AIMS: Action Plan for Self Care on page 3 for some evidence-based areas in which to give to self. This forms a core for giving to others.
Others	Giving to others can involve supporting those who are closest to us, such as family, friends and co-workers, but it can also include random acts of kindness to strangers and people who come into contact with us.
Communities	Giving to communities can mean giving to our workplace or the local sport club, volunteering, or supporting aid organisations. Doing this expands our field of generosity and our awareness of people outside our immediate circle.
Natural environment	The natural environment is a great healer of our physical and mental health. Think of tangible ways to return the favour, such as recycling or buying locally. For more information, visit http://www.livinggreener.gov.au/home .
Whole	The 'whole' means different things to different people. Whether we are spiritual or 'world conscious', feeling that we are part of, and giving to, the 'whole' is a way we can give to something 'bigger' than ourselves.

Call to action

Would you like to have a life with meaning and find out what it's like to live for others as well as yourself? If so, perhaps you would like to start now by following the

Action Plan for Self Care on page 3, and the Action Plan for Giving outlined above—and look forward to an increase in your physical and mental health and happiness!



Why not consider volunteering for an organisation in your local area! Alternatively, you can contact Volunteering Australia on (02) 6251 4060 or visit www.volunteeringaustralia.org for more ideas.

Endnotes

1. Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realise your potential for lasting fulfilment. New York: Free Press.
2. Post, S., Neimark, J., & Moss, O. (2007). Why Good Things Happen to Good People: The Exciting New Research that Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life: Crown Publishing Group.
3. Nielsen, T. W. (2013). 'SELF CARE AIMS' & 'Action Plan for Giving'(Five Dimensions of Giving). Accessed on 8 April 2014 at <http://www.thomaswnielsen.net>

Constructing healthier workplaces - Building stronger communities

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CHOOSE TO CONTRIBUTE

There is one common denominator for what people report as giving them meaningful happiness: it is that of being something for others.

Our modern world is a diverse and fascinating place. But it is also a complex and challenging one, full of consumerism, materialism, and virtual ‘realities’.

Some say we, as a human family, are in a spiritual crisis. Many are pointing to the curious finding that depression and suicide rates have increased worldwide since the end of World War II, despite the fact that most Western countries have at least doubled their spending power¹.

Why is that? We don’t know for sure. But the research is clear on one thing: as long as our basic needs are met, more money does not make us substantially happier. To feel truly happy and healthy on all levels—physically, emotionally and psychologically—we need a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives.

Choose to contribute

While what is meaningful to one person can be something very different to another, there is one common denominator for what people, across cultures, races and religions, report as giving them meaningful happiness: it is that of being something for others. What all definitions share is an element of feeling interconnected with someone or something other than oneself, and as importantly, feeling that one is able to contribute to those connections.

Whether it is contributing to one’s family, friends, the community, the environment, or a cause, what we describe as meaningful in our lives most often contains an element of having the opportunity to give of ourselves to someone or something beyond ourselves. The Greeks called it ‘eudaemonia’—the meaningful life.

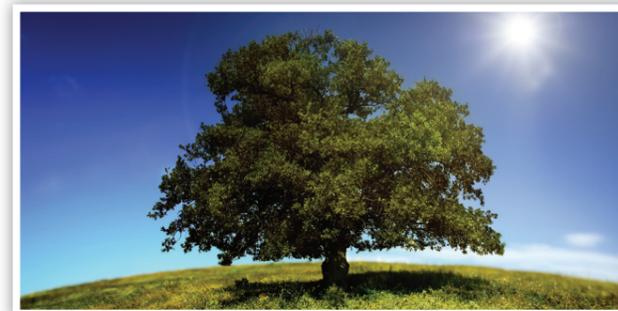


Choose to feel better and live longer

Research shows that giving to others increases our happiness and health significantly. Personal pleasure is not to be dismissed, but it is having meaning in our lives that accounts for our deepest levels of happiness. When we give to others, we not only have higher and more meaningful levels of happiness, we are also more resilient in the face of adversity and recuperate more quickly from traumatic events.

Regular giving has also been found to²:

- enhance happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of control over life
- lower depression and reduce mood disorders
- have a positive impact on mental health, hopefulness and social effectiveness
- be linked with reduced mortality.



Choose to give to yourself

Choosing to give doesn’t mean that we should aim never to be sad or have conflicted feelings. Beyond happy and sad is the idea of treating all feelings, difficult or pleasant, with compassion and understanding, because it is through a generous and loving attitude toward ourselves that we manage to learn from negative emotions and actions, and ultimately, rise above such events.

In fact, research shows that in order to be able to give to others effectively—to live the meaningful life—we need to also learn how to give to ourselves. If we don’t give to ourselves sufficiently, we not only find it harder to give to others, but we also don’t receive the same health benefits from our giving².

The acronym SELF CARE AIMS³ is a helpful reminder of how to give to ourselves. Each letter stands for a step in the Action Plan for Self Care (refer page 3). All of these strategies have a strong evidence base—in other words, they work!

CHOOSE TO FEEL BETTER AND LIVE LONGER

Research shows that giving to others increases our happiness and health significantly.

Action Plan for Self Care

S - Sleep	Most adults need 7–8 hours of sleep each night. Sleep boosts our immune system and fights disease and mood swings. Try to avoid working or screen time right before going to bed, as it has been shown to disturb or prevent sleep. For more tips on healthy sleeping, visit http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au .
E - Exercise	The human body is made to move. Exercise not only improves our physical health but also increases endorphins, hormones that fight depression and other mood disorders. For more tips on exercise, visit http://www.physicalactivityaustralia.org.au .
L - Love & Laughter	We need to nurture relationships with our partner, friends and family, and we need to laugh and have fun with them. Good relationships help us de-stress and re-charge, and are a source of much of our mental health and happiness.
F - Food	Our bodies need healthy food and to be hydrated for optimal health and happiness. Processed food high in sugar and fat has been linked to a number of diseases, high blood pressure and mood disorders. For more tips on healthy eating, visit the website http://www.nutritionaustralia.org .
C - Creativity	Creativity varies from person to person, but most of us need a creative outlet in our lives. Whether it is making or listening to music, painting, or having a hobby—expressing our ‘inner’ self in some way can have a very positive effect on our health and happiness.
A - Achievement	Whether or not we are high achievers, it’s good to feel we are achieving something. Achievements can be small (e.g. reading a good book) or significant (e.g. getting a qualification), but we should try to achieve something worthwhile regularly, preferably daily.
R - Residence	Whether we live in a campervan or a mansion, we need to know there is a space where we can recharge. Luxurious things are not important, but order, cleanliness and a pleasing home environment can all put us in a good frame of mind.
E - Environment	Studies show that there are tangible health benefits to getting out into nature or being surrounded by the natural environment. Try and make a habit of doing this on a regular basis (e.g. cycle a scenic route to work).
A - Autonomy	We need to ensure we have time for ourselves and to feel free to make our own choices. However, we often make ourselves ‘slaves’ to efficiency (e.g. technology), so we need to look at setting limits so we have time to ‘switch off’.
I - Income	Money is an important resource. How we handle money is also important for our peace of mind. We have to manage our income with care, while seeing it as a means to also give to others or worthy causes, as this adds to our sense of happiness too.
M - Meditation & Mindfulness	Studies show significant benefits to our health and happiness from practicing meditation and mindfulness. A key element to this is the practice and cultivation of positive thoughts (e.g. gratitude, optimism, hope). For information on becoming more mindful, visit the websites http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/features/meditation-toolkit/ , http://www.calm.com/ and http://www.freemindfulness.org .
S - Study (the world & ourselves)	Our brain cells are like our muscles—use them or lose them! Whether it’s reading an article or self-help book or getting some professional development, when we study we develop and strengthen synapses in the brain. It’s also good to keep a journal, as writing things down helps us to clarify and analyse our thoughts, feelings and actions for the purpose of self-improvement.