

# Little Ways to Make Yourself Feel Better



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Feeling tired, stressed, irritable, or anxious? Modern life gives adults a tough row to hoe, particularly when the weather and world events look grim. If the daily grind seems out of control and almost more than you can bear, you might want to stop and take stock of ways to make yourself feel better.

When we were kids, our parents applied kisses, Band-Aids, and other staple remedies that made our pain bearable and lifted our spirits. Once we moved out and found a full-time job, though, the task of parenting landed squarely on our own shoulders: no one can soothe the adult you except you.

If you need practice in seeing yourself as your own parent, imagine carving out a little piece of yourself that will sit apart from you and monitor you from a distance. The voice of this benevolent spy can help keep you aware of your wants, your needs, your values, and your feelings generally.

Don't know what you want or need? Consult your feelings for reliable guidance about pain and pleasure. As often as possible during the day, ask yourself, "What am I feeling right now? What do I need to do to take care of myself right now?" If it's hard to know how you feel—and women in particular tend to tune into everyone else's feelings before their own—here's a brief exercise that can help.

Imagine each day as a path you walk that leads from morning to night. Over time, as you develop a routine, the path becomes worn and familiar. You rise at the same time, eat the same things for breakfast, drive the same route to work, and follow the same schedule. As the years pass, you acquire more and more habits. If you want to develop a greater awareness of your feelings, try doing at least a few things differently.

Buy a breakfast food you've never tried. Listen to a different radio station. Drive a different way to work. Go to bed a little later or a little earlier. Sample a different sort of book, music, movie, or restaurant.

Leave your beaten path to meet new people. Each time you depart from an established habit, check back with yourself and notice your gut reaction. Positive, negative, or somewhere in between? With practice, your feelings will deliver reliable news bulletins on a regular basis.

Once you have developed an innate awareness of your feelings from one moment to the next, you can cultivate ways of calibrating yourself continuously for peak performance and maximum comfort. Moderate your daily expectations so that you don't overload yourself and so that you provide yourself with frequent opportunities to take pride in a job well done. Identify things you can do to improve your mood (a poem, a rose, a favorite food) or help your body function more smoothly (a nap or a walk).

Each of us needs to have a smorgasbord of feel-good activities from which we can choose so that we can give ourselves first aid at any hour of the day or night. Your personal list should include something for every occasion, from a five-minute quickie to one or two hours at the spa to a minivacation lasting a whole weekend. The suggestions below will tickle your imagination and get you started on your own personal list of pick-me-ups.

1. Go for a walk in the woods
2. Buy yourself a rose
3. Take a long, hot bath with bubbles
4. Listen to relaxation tapes
5. Listen to music
6. Do some thought switching
7. Meditate
8. Do yoga
9. Try tai chi
10. Paint a picture
11. Draw your future
12. Rearrange a room
13. Make bread
14. Learn to play the recorder
15. Go to an agricultural fair
16. Work on a hobby
17. Sign up to volunteer somewhere
18. Offer to help someone else
19. Spend time with a toddler
20. Play with your dog or cat
21. Start a wildflower life list
22. Go to a museum
23. Read a novel
24. Write a poem or story
25. Go to the beach
26. Build a sandcastle
27. Plan a mental health day off from work
28. Ride your bicycle
29. Weed or plant your garden
30. See an upbeat movie
31. Spend an afternoon with a friend
32. Do deep breathing exercises
33. Make a video
34. Start a photo album
35. Go fishing
36. Mentor a child
37. Take a class
38. Do something you have been putting off
39. Solve a computer mystery or RPG
40. Clean your house
41. Plan a vacation you have always wanted to take
42. Make a new friend
43. Call an old friend you haven't seen in a long time

44. Write someone a letter
45. Go to church—or go to a new church
46. Have an ice cream cone
47. Make homemade ice cream
48. Bake cookies
49. Make jam, jelly, chutney, pickles, or sauerkraut
50. Solve a jigsaw or crossword puzzle
51. Go dancing
52. Take a boat ride
53. Go canoeing
54. Ride a horse
55. Go birdwatching
56. Go swimming
57. Make pomanders
58. Make a cartoon or a joke collection
59. Blow bubbles
60. Make and fly paper airplanes
61. Start your autobiography
62. Read a biography
63. Make a collage
64. Write a love letter
65. Create some affirmations for yourself
66. Thank your body for work well done
67. Visit a nature center

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