

How to Harness the Power of Positive Psychology



SILVER RIDGE

A PREMIER PROGRAM BY PYRAMID HEALTHCARE



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Foreword

Positive psychology is a relatively new field of study that embraces the idea that humans are drawn by the future more than we're driven by the past.

Officially established in 1999, positive psychology is concerned with helping people find meaning and joy in life. It uses scientific understanding and research-based interventions to help people achieve satisfaction and purpose in life through personal growth, healthy relationships and meaningful engagement.

Harvard psychiatrist George Vaillant, a pioneer in the field, views positive psychology as an effective way to encourage people to focus on using their strengths to nurture positive emotions and change negative patterns of thought and behavior.¹ He notes that while the standard psychiatric textbook used by clinicians devotes thousands of lines to anxiety and depression

and hundreds to negative emotions like fear, anger and guilt, not one line mentions love or compassion, and only five lines in the entire book refer to hope.

Hope is the very foundation of recovery from an addiction, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.² Hope is the belief that a better future is possible, and it's what fuels your motivation to work for something better in recovery. It drives you to find peace, to find purpose and meaning in life and to find ways to make life fun and exhilarating again.

Positive psychology is all about identifying, using and nurturing your strengths every day to live a pleasant, engaged and meaningful life. Applying some of its principles to your life in recovery can help you meet and overcome challenges and achieve a higher level of happiness and well-being.



The Four Major
Dimensions of
Recovery



Although positive psychology isn't specifically concerned with recovering from an addiction, the ideas contained within its scope align seamlessly with the four major dimensions that support a life in recovery. These are:

- 1 Health, or good physical and emotional well-being
- 2 Home, or a safe, stable place to live
- 3 Purpose, or the pursuit of meaning and enjoyment in life
- 4 Community, or a network of relationships that offer support, friendship, hope and love

A photograph of a man and a woman on a boat during sunset. The man, with grey hair and a beard, is wearing a white shirt and has his arm around the woman's shoulder. The woman is wearing a striped shirt and sunglasses. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows the ocean and the boat's railing, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow.

Five Elements of
Well-Being

Dr. Martin Seligman, widely regarded as the founder of positive psychology, says that the overarching topic of positive psychology is well-being, which is the state of being comfortable, happy and in good physical and emotional health.³ He identifies five elements of well-being, which we pursue for their own sake:

- 1 Positive emotions, including satisfaction, awe, curiosity, compassion and pride
- 2 Engagement, or involving yourself in enjoyable, meaningful pursuits
- 3 Relationships, which offer love, support and purpose
- 4 Meaning, or working toward something larger than yourself
- 5 Accomplishments, or the pursuit of mastery and success

Positive psychology helps people achieve authentic happiness by identifying their strengths and using them every day to foster personal growth in each of these five domains of well-being.



24 Personal Strengths

We all have strengths, but they can be hard to identify if we haven't cultivated them. Identifying and using your strengths and values creates positive emotions. This process helps you find your niche.

A classification of six universal values are broken down into 24 strengths:

Strengths of knowledge and wisdom:

- 1 Creativity, originality, ingenuity
- 2 Curiosity, openness to experience
- 3 Open-mindedness, critical thinking
- 4 Love of learning
- 5 Perspective, wisdom

Strengths of courage:

- 6 Bravery
- 7 Persistence, industriousness
- 8 Integrity, honesty, authenticity
- 9 Vitality, enthusiasm, energy

Strengths of humanity:

- 10 Love
- 11 Kindness, compassion, generosity
- 12 Social, emotional and personal intelligence

Strengths of justice:

- 13 Citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty
- 14 Fairness
- 15 Leadership

Strengths of temperance:

- 16 Forgiveness, mercy
- 17 Humility, modesty
- 18 Prudence
- 19 Self-regulation

Strengths of Transcendence:

- 20 Appreciation of beauty, wonder, awe
- 21 Gratitude
- 22 Hope, optimism
- 23 Humor, playfulness
- 24 Spirituality, purpose



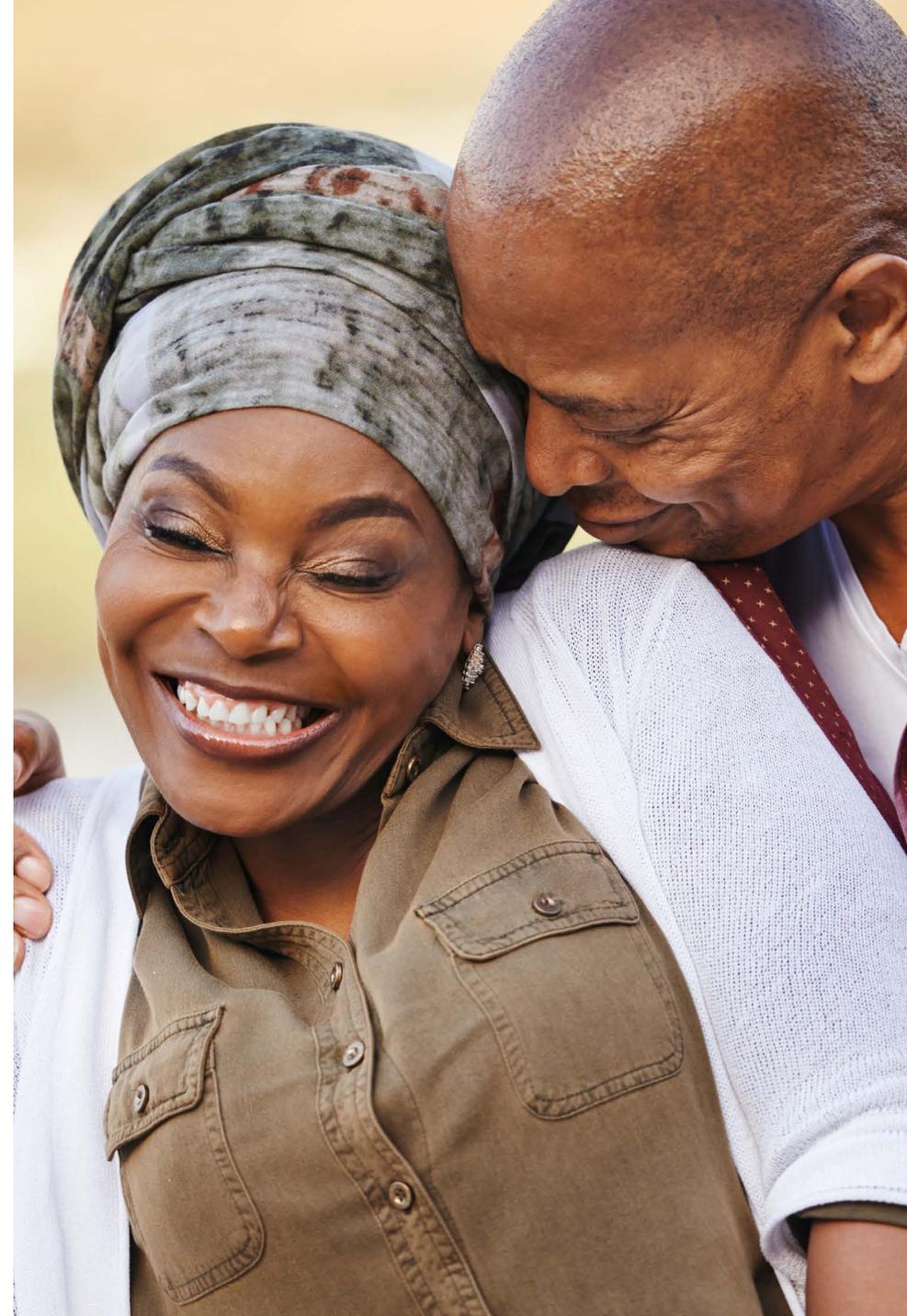
Focusing on the
Five Elements of
Well-Being

Well-being is central to successful recovery, and it's the path to authentic happiness. Here are some practical ways to promote each of the five elements of well-being in your life.

1. Positive Emotions

Positive emotions encompass a wide range of feelings, such as contentment, pleasure, excitement, awe and pride. These positive feelings are often connected to a number of positive outcomes, including longevity and happier relationships.

Evidence shows that positive emotions can undo the effects of negative emotions. Cultivating positive emotions can strengthen psychological resilience, improve attention span and cognition and enable creative and flexible thinking.⁴ These are very helpful in recovery.



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If drugs or alcohol were the major pathway to positive emotions, it can take time to realign your thoughts with reality and nurture new, healthier ways of thinking. Here are some ways to foster more positive emotions in your life:

Express gratitude. Gratitude makes us happier and fosters optimism. When you focus on what you're thankful for, you'll attract more of the same. You're focusing on the things you want in your life, and it's hard to be negative when you're being positive. Gratefulness opens us up to new possibilities and keeps us focused on the good things in our lives. Keep a gratitude journal, and every day, write down three things you're grateful for, large or small, significant or insignificant.

Live in the present moment. Worrying about the future or dwelling on the past can block positive emotions. By focusing your attention on the present moment, you're more likely to experience positive emotions. Daily meditation can help you stay rooted in the present and increase mindfulness surrounding your thoughts and attitudes.

Find ways to increase specific positive emotions. Choose a positive emotion you want to increase, and decide how you can promote that emotion every day. For example, if you want to feel more contentment, consider the activities that make you feel content, such as spending time with loved ones or curling up with a good book, and pursue them.

Cultivate positive daily rituals. Take pleasure in little things, and develop daily rituals around positive experiences. Take a walk in the sunshine each morning, spend time each day writing or making art, exercise or savor a healthy snack.



2. Engagement

If you've ever been so involved in a project that you lost all track of time and sense of self, you know what engagement feels like. This state is known as "flow," a feeling of intensity and complete absorption in a task at hand.

Engagement involves activities that stem from your strengths and natural interests. Finding hobbies and other pleasurable ways to spend time is an important focus in treatment. Hobbies keep you challenged and engaged, and they let you follow your bliss and enjoy a state of flow. But while hobbies come easily to some people, others struggle to find activities they enjoy.



According to positive psychologist Dr. Leslie Becker-Phelps, finding activities you enjoy and achieving engagement requires identifying your "signature strengths" and using them every day.⁵ These are the traits that are expressions of the "real you." Engage in activities that use and build on these strengths. For example, if your one of your strengths is compassion, consider volunteering for a favorite cause. If curiosity is one of your strengths, actively engage in following your line of inquiry to see where it leads you.

Having trouble identifying your strengths? These suggestions may help:

Ask other people. People you trust can help you see strengths in yourself that you may not be aware of.

Consider what people compliment you on. What do people often praise you for? These can help clue you in to your strengths.

Determine what you're most proud of in your life. Things that you're proud of in your life—your perseverance, your ability to make others feel at ease—are often the things you're strongest at.

Identify the times you feel most like yourself. Maybe it's when you're helping others, solving problems, being creative or pursuing knowledge.

The University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness website at <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/> offers a number of questionnaires that can help you identify your strengths. You have to register to use the site, but it's free.

3. Relationships

Humans are social creatures, and relationships are a major factor in cultivating authentic happiness. We rely on others for love, acceptance, support and encouragement. Positive relationships are enormously important for fueling positive emotions.

Positive relationships make us feel good about ourselves and others. Developing healthy relationships is a major focus in recovery. It requires an investment of energy that lets us show up, be present, engage and show we care.



Here are some proven ways to foster healthy relationships:

Show appreciation. Thoughtful gestures that show someone you're thinking of them and appreciate them is a form of generosity that strengthens and nurtures your relationships and promotes positive emotions.

Take an interest. Showing others that you're interested in them is a matter of being present, engaging in deeper discussions about how they're doing and inviting them to do things.

Accept and respect. An important factor in a healthy relationship is accepting the not-so-great along with the wonderful and showing love, acceptance and respect, despite differing views.

Reciprocate. Healthy relationships require both people to put equal effort into meeting the other's needs, offering the benefit of the doubt, creating positive interactions and repairing little problems.

Meet basic needs. Basic needs in a relationship are affection, companionship and emotional support. Focus on meeting these needs in your relationships with others. If you're involved in relationships that are one-sided, meaning that the other party doesn't meet your basic needs, it may be time to re-evaluate the relationship.

Solve problems. Relationship problems are normal, but people in healthy relationships work actively to reduce conflict and find ways to compromise. Recognizing when someone is angry, upset or unhappy and addressing it in a constructive way strengthens relationships and promotes positive feelings. Apologizing and graciously accepting apologies are important in a healthy relationship.

4. Meaning

A meaningful life is a purposeful life, and finding purpose is a matter of using your strengths in the service of a greater desirable goal. Meaning doesn't necessarily have a single source. You may find meaning in a variety of places, including your relationships, work, personal projects, social causes and hobbies.

When you consciously engage your strengths on a daily basis, you almost can't help but create meaning in your life. The answer to the question of "why?" becomes more clear, and you find a sense of purpose.



Here are some ways to promote meaning and purpose in your life:

Set goals. Identifying and setting specific goals and working every day to achieve them helps you stay focused on things that are important to you.

Follow your bliss. Engaging in pursuits that you're passionate about gives your life meaning.

Pay attention to the moments. As you move about your day, pause to appreciate small things. When you have a positive emotion, enjoy it and explore it. Savor time spent with a loved one; express gratitude for the things you have that make you feel safe or comfortable.

Use your strengths in new ways. Find new ways to employ your signature strengths. If you're creative, apply your creativity to a problem at work, or try a new form of artistic expression.

Pursue spirituality. Not to be confused with religion, spirituality is a feeling of being connected to something bigger than yourself. Getting in touch with your spiritual side can help you develop a higher sense of purpose and enjoy a more meaningful life.



5. Accomplishments

Pursuing success and mastery leads to accomplishments, and these can activate positive emotions and give meaning and purpose to your life. Reflecting on your accomplishments builds positivity, strengthens your resilience, promotes feelings of gratitude and enhances your self-efficacy. It makes you want to accomplish more. Working toward goals builds hope for the future, and ruminating on past successes can give you more confidence to keep setting and reaching more goals.

When setting goals, make them measurable and actionable. Identify the strengths you need to hone or cultivate to reach your goal. Write down your goals, and refer to them often to help you stay focused on achieving them. Embrace setbacks as learning opportunities, and celebrate successes and the positive emotions they produce. When you're feeling overwhelmed or negative, review your past accomplishments for renewed energy and resolve.



Other Exercises in
Positive Psychology

Numerous exercises and interventions in the field of positive psychology can help you maintain a healthy attitude and a positive outlook as you navigate the challenges of recovery. Here are some simple ways to incorporate principles of positive psychology into your life.

Balance the Positive and Negative

Framing your point of view toward the positive can help you balance the negative in your life, and it'll give you more power to make necessary changes that will lead to a higher sense of well-being. View problems as opportunities, and look for the positive spin in a situation. Express gratitude daily to help keep your focus on what you have rather than on what you lack.

Pull Up a Chair to Your Negative Emotions

While a positive attitude is important, negative feelings are part of being human. When we try to avoid these feelings, problems arise. Cope with negative feelings by embracing them and asking yourself where they're coming from and what they're trying to tell you, rather than avoiding them. Acknowledging and examining negative emotions helps to reduce their intensity.

Catch Yourself Coping

It's easy to beat yourself up for snapping at your child or becoming self-indulgent in response to stress, but it's important to forgive yourself and move on. It's also easy to overlook times when you coped with difficult emotions in a capable, compassionate way. Catch yourself not yelling at your spouse, not turning to vices to cope, not letting a difficult morning ruin your whole day. Catching yourself coping will give you confidence to continue working through challenging emotions in the future. Spend a little time at the end of each day reviewing what went right.

Be Kind to Yourself

When you treat yourself unkindly, you unleash negative emotions that cause stress and discord, but treating yourself kindly leads to greater happiness, higher self-esteem and self-forgiveness. It fosters positive emotions and promotes a higher level of self-care, which is crucial during recovery. Cut yourself some slack. When you're feeling hateful toward yourself, take a step toward something positive. Book a lunch date with a friend, visit an art gallery, take a relaxing bath.





Be Kind to Others

The way we think about and treat other people is often a reflection of the way we think about and treat ourselves. Choose to be kind to others. Let a driver merge into your lane, help someone find what they're looking for at the store, or encourage someone who appears to be feeling down. Over time, being kind to others leads to kindness toward yourself.

Forgive

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to let go of feelings of vengeance or resentment toward someone who has wronged you. Forgiveness doesn't mean you have to reconcile with a toxic friend or even interact with someone who hurt you. It simply means that you're choosing to let go of grudges or negative feelings to improve your own happiness and well-being.

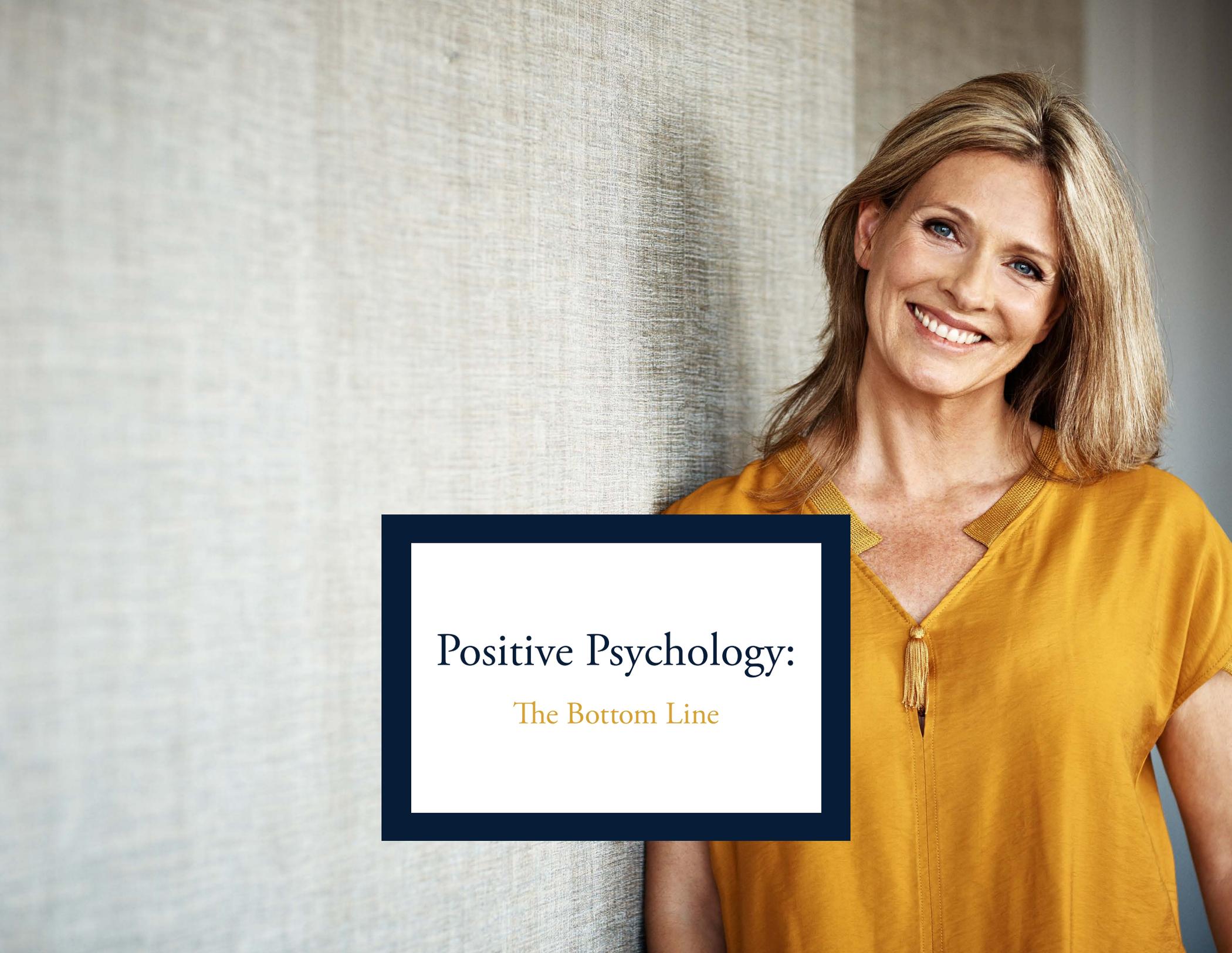


Connect with Your Community

Engaging with your community is a good way to nurture positivity and develop healthy, meaningful relationships. It also provides opportunities for engagement and feeling positive emotions. Join a book club, yoga class or sports team. Make time for social visits with friends over coffee or dinner. Volunteer your time for a cause that's important to you.

Exercise Every Day

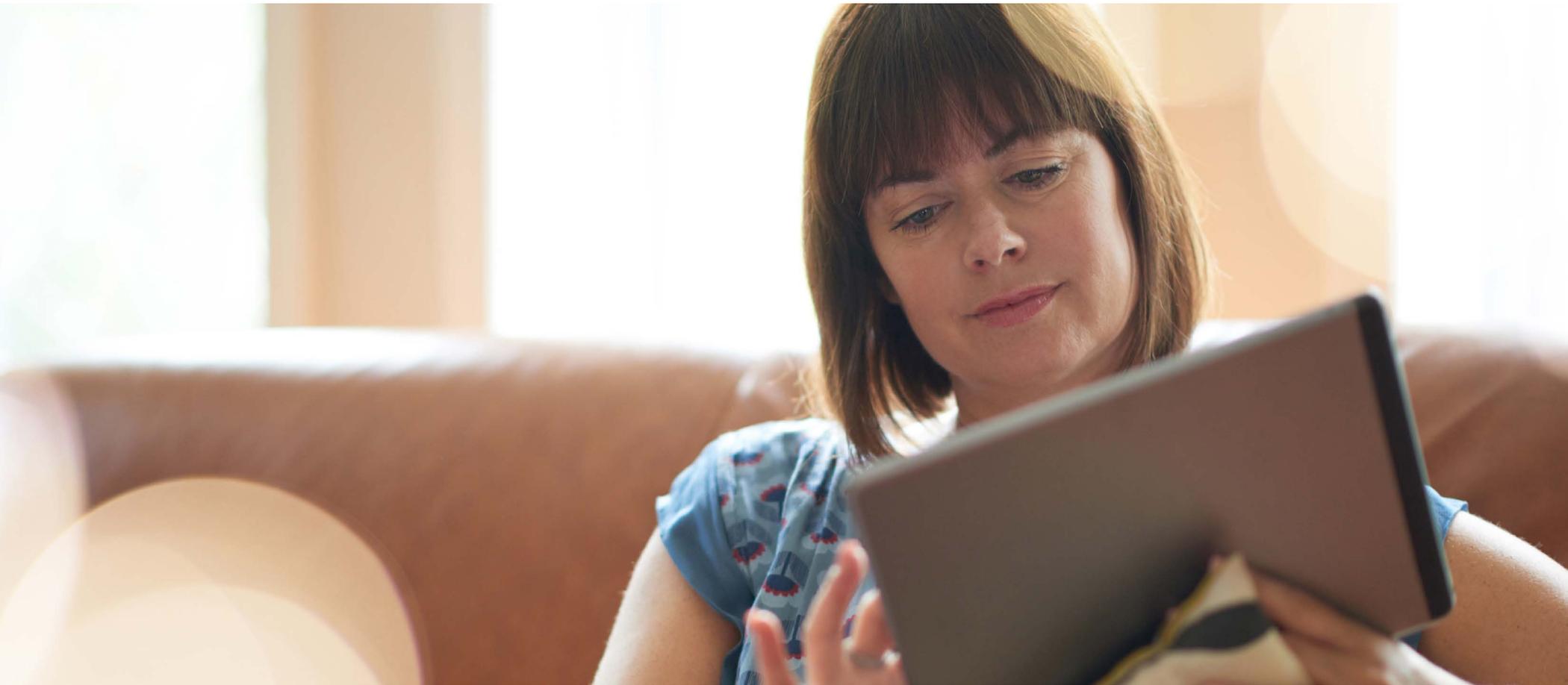
The key principle behind positive psychology is promoting physical and emotional well-being, and daily exercise is an important factor in accomplishing this. Exercise releases feel-good brain chemicals that make you feel happy and content, and it relieves stress, which is at the root of a range of negative emotions. Exercise leads to better physical health as well, which improves all areas of your life. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends getting a half hour of moderate-intensity exercise five days a week for better health and happiness.⁶



Positive Psychology:

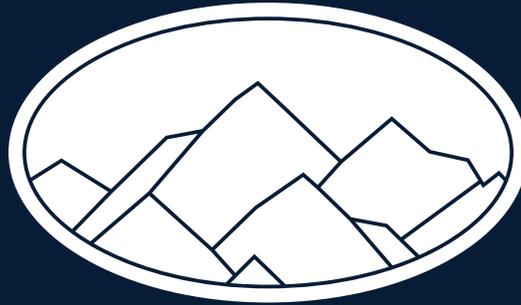
The Bottom Line

Abundant research shows that skewing toward the positive can transform lives, leading to a higher sense of meaning and purpose and a higher overall level of authentic happiness. Incorporating positive psychology into your life can make a big difference in your recovery by helping you identify and use your strengths in the pursuit of a life well-lived. Thinking positively comes more easily with practice, and regular practice will lead to a keener sense of well-being and a higher quality of life.



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Every great legacy has a strong foundation. Build yours here.