Increasing Rewarding Experiences

There is strong theory and research indicating that emotional distress may be caused or worsened by a decreased engagement in rewarding experiences and activities. Therefore, an effective strategy for reducing distress is to increase the amount of rewarding activities in your life.

There are two types of rewarding activities: “pleasurable” activities and “mastery” activities.

- **Pleasurable activities** are those that are just plain fun.
- **Mastery activities** are those that give you a sense of accomplishment or pride.

Increasing pleasurable and mastery activities may seem difficult at first. You may feel that there is no time in your day for anything else. You may also feel that you have no interest or no motivation to do anything. These feelings and reactions are common. Unfortunately, some people get trapped by the myth that motivation must come first (i.e., they incorrectly believe that they can’t increase their activities until they “feel motivated”). The truth is that oftentimes motivation develops after you begin the activity. It is often necessary, therefore, to make a plan for increasing rewarding activities, and to stick to the plan, even when you don’t particularly feel like it. As you begin to increase your rewarding activities, you will likely find that your motivation and interest in doing them gradually increase, as well.

**Make a list of any pleasurable activities that you have decreased (or quit) doing recently:**

____________________  _____________________    ____________________
____________________ _____________________    ____________________

**Make a list of any mastery activities that you have decreased (or quit) doing recently:**

____________________  _____________________    ____________________
____________________ _____________________    ____________________

**Now make a list of additional activities that you believe might be fun and pleasant, or might give you a sense of accomplishment and mastery.** If you have trouble coming up with ideas, consider talking with a friend, family member, or behavioral health consultant to help generate ideas. You may also find some activities that seem to “fit” you and your life from the list on the following page.

____________________  _____________________    ____________________
____________________ _____________________    ____________________
Potentially Pleasurable and Mastery Activities

Listening to music
Taking a walk
Knitting/sewing
Playing golf
Fishing
Reading stories, novels, poems
Playing with the kids
Talking on the phone
Writing a letter
Cleaning the house
Straightening the office
Playing cards
Painting
Playing tennis
Gardening
Doing a crossword
Watching a movie
Going to church
Visiting friends
Playing board games
Going out to eat
Dancing
Woodworking
Exercising
Going for a drive
Riding a bike
Swimming
Playing an instrument
Camping
Bird watching
Going to a sports event
Shopping
Working with computer
Daydreaming
Singing
Watching t.v.
Ceramics
Photography
Being in the country
Talking about sports
Going to a concert
Planning trips or vacations
 Buying things for myself
Being at the beach
Reading the scriptures
Rearranging/redecorating house
Breathing clean air
Working on machines
Playing cards
Laughing
Shaving
Having lunch with friends
Taking a bath or shower
Driving
Being with animals
Going to social/church functions
Making snacks
Skiing
Being in a city
Making food or crafts to give away
Playing pool or billiards
Being with grandchildren
Playing chess or checkers
Putting on makeup, fixing hair
Watching wild animals
Visiting people who are sick/alone
Gardening, landscaping, yardwork
Sitting in the sun
Just sitting and thinking
Talking about philosophy or religion
Listening to the sounds of nature
Dating
Having a lively talk
Listening to the radio
Having friends come to visit
Giving gifts
Going to school/government meetings
Getting massages or backrubs
Getting letters, cards, or notes
Watching the sky, clouds, or a storm
Going on outings (park, picnic, BBQ)
Buying something for family
Gathering natural objects
Helping someone
Working on my finances
Being in the mountains
Hearing jokes
Talking about my children/grandkids
Meeting someone new
Eating good meals
Improving my health
Wrestling or boxing
Organizing a closet
Hunting or shooting
Playing in a musical group
Hiking
Going to a museum
Writing papers, essays, poems
Fishing
Doing a job well
Loaning something
Pleasing employers or teachers
Counseling someone
Going to a health club or sauna
Learning to do something new
Complimenting or praising someone
Going to a “drive in”
Thinking about people I like
Being with my parents
Having daydreams
Kicking leaves, sand, pebbles
Playing lawn sports
Going to school reunions
Seeing famous people
Kissing
Being alone
Cooking meals
Budgeting my time
Doing “odd jobs” around home
Being at a family get-together
Giving a party or get-together
Washing my hair
Coaching someone
Using cologne, perfume, aftershave
Talking about old times
Having peace and quiet
Visiting friends
Writing in a diary
Saying prayers
Giving massages or backrubs
Meditating or doing yoga
Talking with people on the job
Being relaxed
Reading the newspaper
Walking barefoot
Playing frisbee or catch
Doing housework or laundry
Being with my roommate
Talking about sex
Going to a barber or beautician
Going to the library
Preparing a new or special food
Watching people
Building or watching a fire
Confessing or apologizing
Having coffee or tea
Going to auctions/garage sales
Playing with pets
Organizing my kitchen
Visiting a pet store

Primary Care Behavioral Health

MHS Military Health System

health.mil
INCREASING REWARDING EXPERIENCES
(CONT.)

Use your own list of pleasurable and mastery activities to make a plan to increase rewarding experiences in your life each day.

In the morning, plan at least one pleasurable and one mastery activity for the day. At the end of the day list several things you did that day that gave you a sense of pleasure and accomplishment.

The following chart may help you get started, remain motivated and “on track,” and remind you of the progress you make.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>My pleasurable activity today will be...</th>
<th>My mastery activity today will be...</th>
<th>My most fun activities today were...</th>
<th>My significant accomplishments today were...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>