

Creating Lasting Happiness

Have you ever really wanted something, a new car, a new phone, a promotion, a pay rise, a new outfit, and thought, "I'll be so happy when I get that"?

Then you get it. It feels brilliant for a while, and before long it just becomes normal.

Psychologists call this **hedonic adaptation**. We tend to adjust surprisingly quickly to changes in our circumstances, even positive ones. The initial boost in happiness fades and we often find ourselves looking for the next thing that might make us feel good.

This is sometimes called the **hedonic treadmill**, because we can keep chasing more without necessarily feeling any happier in the long term.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying nice things or wanting to improve your circumstances. The point is simply to notice which things give you a temporary lift and which experiences, activities and changes seem to add something more lasting to your life.

YOUR HAPPINESS AUDIT

Think back over the last year and write down some of the things that made you happier.

These could be possessions, experiences, achievements, changes in your circumstances, relationships or things you started doing differently.

For each one, ask yourself:

What made me happy?

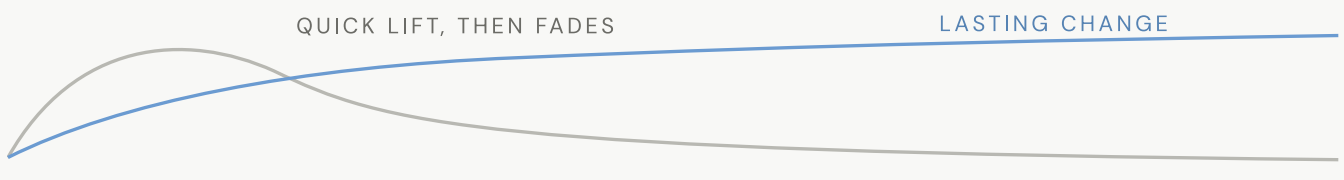
How long did the boost last?

What was it about this that made me feel good?

Did the happiness come from the thing itself, or from what it allowed me to experience?

For example, buying a new car might feel exciting for a few weeks before becoming normal. Joining a tennis club might continue adding to your life months later because you're moving your body, learning something, meeting people and having something to look forward to.

That difference matters.



WHAT MADE ME HAPPY	HOW LONG IT LASTED	WHAT WAS REALLY BEHIND IT

LOOK FOR THE PATTERN

Now look back over what you've written. Which things gave you a quick burst of happiness and then faded? Which things continued to make your life better?

Pay particular attention to what sits underneath the things that lasted. You might notice themes such as connection, freedom, learning, progress, contribution, creativity, adventure, movement or spending time with people you love.

Sometimes money and possessions can absolutely contribute to happiness, but often it's because of what they make possible. A pay rise might reduce financial stress. A holiday might create time with someone you love. A new home might give you a greater sense of security or freedom.

The interesting question is: what actually made the difference?

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Choose one thing you've identified that seems to create more lasting happiness and think about how you could deliberately bring more of it into your life. Keep it small and realistic.

Instead of simply thinking, "I need more fun," decide what fun looks like and put something in the diary. Instead of "I should see my friends more," message someone and arrange a date. Instead of "I want more adventure," choose one new place to visit this month.

The goal isn't to stop enjoying the short term pleasures — it's to make sure you're not spending all your energy chasing the next thing while overlooking what actually makes your life feel better.

Based on what you've noticed, what could you do more of over the next month that might improve your happiness for longer?