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12 WAYS TO SPIKE YOUR HAPPY HORMONES

BY ANDREA STANLEY

IF THERE WERE A HAPPINESS cocktail, we'd be mixing one up right now (a margarita comes close, but...). Truth is, sometimes it's damn hard to summon a blissed-out natural buzz. "Happiness can feel abstract, transcendent, and complicated," says Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*. It often seems like you have to do something huge (think: landing the perfect job or planning a dream vacation) to find fulfillment and experience real joy. But here's a feel-good fact: "There is plenty of low-hanging fruit that will improve your mood," says Rubin, "and there are easily a million little things you can do for an immediate lift." Let's start with 12 simple activities that unleash one or more of your bod's spirit-boosting hormones. (Okay, so they're not technically all hormones, but semantics aside, these natural wonders give you a high-on-life bounce.)

THE HAPPINESS OGs

- ADRENALINE**
A hormone released when you're scared. It's called a rush for a reason: It makes you feel alive and exhilarated.
- DOPAMINE**
A neurotransmitter dubbed "the reward molecule." Levels rise when you experience something new or surprising.
- ENDORPHINS**
These neurochemicals are your body's supply of organic painkillers. If you've ever had a runner's high, it's because of them.
- GABA**
This molecule actually turns off nerves in your brain, giving you a cozy feeling of calm—kinda like a natural Xanax.
- OXYTOCIN**
The hormone springs into action when you feel a bond—or sense of trust and loyalty—with someone else.
- SEROTONIN**
Feeling confident and good about yourself unleashes this neurotransmitter.

THE ACTIVITIES

- Play With a Puppy**
Interacting with a furry friend—or even scrolling through cute kitten photos—triggers your bonding instinct. Thank evolution: We trust animals with big eyes.
- Spend Time in Your Head**
Taking 10 minutes (or just 1) to meditate can help override anxiety, replacing it with chemicals of calm.
- Get Off Your Feet**
Hop, skip, jump. You might feel funny doing it, but that's the mood-boosting magic. Anything that causes you to belly-laugh and jiggle your insides spurs endorphins, thanks to an unexpected release of muscle tension.
- Bitch It Out**
A vent session is a precursor to a positive mind-set, even if what you're talking about is neggy. You feel bonded with the pal you're talking to, and knowing that someone sees the situation the way you do ups your confidence.
- Try Acupuncture**
A quiet space allows for chill thoughts, which gets GABA going, and the needles kick up endorphins.
- Eat a Chili Pepper**
Your brain craves variety, so when you try a new dish, your body high-fives you with dopamine. And because you're in a little pain (ooh, hot!), endorphins flow too.
- Embrace JOMO**
A change of pace from your typical Friday night out stimulates your brain, and you get a confidence boost from taking charge of your own time. The trick: Ignore your phone, put on a face mask, and crack open a book.
- Stand Taller**
You'll get a hit of endorphins and a surge of self-esteem just by straightening up.
- Buy Coffee for a Stranger**
Sure, all you know about the guy behind you is that he's as hot as the latte he ordered, but this act of kindness creates enough of a bond to get the joy flowing.
- Hit a Concert**
Attending a musical (or sports or political) event ignites a sense that everyone is feeling the way you do. That's like being bonded times a thousand.
- Go Skydiving**
Or master paddleboarding, or ask for a raise—anything scary that leaves your palms sweaty and pulse racing. You'll feel *ah-mazing* when you accomplish it. Trust.
- Exercise**
To power through the burn, your brain produces endorphins, then doles out dopamine as a reward for getting your ass off the couch. Bring a friend to a workout and you'll also score oxytocin and serotonin.