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Filip Teovanovic 5.3K reads

Mental Habits to Avoid, if You Want to Be Happy

Humans are creatures of habit. The predominant part of our everyday behavior is constructed of automatic behavioral patterns that occur without a significant investment of conscious effort.

That being said, some habits are detrimental for our physical, as well as mental health.

In the context of a negative outlook on life, saying that it is merely a bad habit would be an underestimation of the problem.

Still, the majority of people, struggling with unhappiness, manifest recurrent, irrational mental operations that strongly influence their levels of life-satisfaction. If we can say that bad habits are a torment, then breaking those habits is double the anguish, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

To provide more insight into the topic, below are six mental habits you should avoid, especially if you are struggling to uproot negativity from your life.



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Controlling the Future

Represents an irrational need to control events and circumstances that we believe will occur in the (near) future. Imagining how you can control future events like you are some time alchemist, is not going to make your present so pleasant.

Researchers have found that indulging in these fantasies and obsessively trying to plan the outcomes of uncertain future events, leads to high levels of anxiety.

Getting Stuck in Past Mistakes

Is there a typical behavior for those who struggle with pessimism. Such individuals judge themselves harshly and have a tendency to turn mistakes from the past into a self-torturous game of blame and guilt. Acknowledging your mistakes is one thing, but obsessing over them is fruitless and can only force you into a vicious cycle of negativity.

Remember that the past cannot be changed, which is why the most you can do is accept it and consider what you can do from now on.

Self-Analyzing

Refers to the meticulous analysis of your personality. It is one of the worst mental habits you can engage in since it is very likely to lead to negativity.

While it is beneficial and adaptive to analyze your behavioral strategies in the context of setting goals and nurturing your aspirations, it is completely useless to analyze your personality. By doing so, you risk identifying with negative emotions, negative convictions, and negative cognitive patterns.

Self-analysis is the act of non-acceptance. It is a bit like thinking: "I am in love with myself, but I am afraid it is not mutual".

Only accepting and loving yourself will lead to change and change is the antidote for misery. If that is not convincing enough, remember that if you can't love yourself, you are not going to be able to love somebody else either.

Scrutinizing Your Emotions

If you take apart what you are feeling, the moment you feel it, it might mean that you are resisting the full experience of your emotions. The result will likely be an accumulation of inner conflict, also known as stress, the latent variable causing unhappiness.

The Healthy Response

What is healthy emotional processing then? When you feel something, it is much better to let yourself feel it fully, without trying to block it out, by rationalizing and overanalyzing. Once the feeling has subsided, you can consider everything that has happened and reach a decision.

Brain Chemistry

During intense emotional states, blood withdraws from the prefrontal cortex occurs, which is the home address of decision-making and planning. The individual experiencing this process thus finds it difficult to think rationally.

When your brain chemistry takes away from your tolerance and flexibility, the best thing to do is to refrain from making any decisions, at least for the time being. Otherwise, the consequences can be stressful and have negative repercussions on your life.

Negative Exaggeration

Represents a tendency to intensify emotional experiences. Everyone wants to be a drama king or a drama queen until they realize just how heavy the crown is.

Chronic, intense emotional experiences lead to mental problems. If you often feel strongly affected, then it is likely that your thinking patterns tend to be irrational.

Protracted exposure to this cognitive-emotional combo is exhausting and can easily make us susceptible not only to depression but also to other types of psychological disorders. Frequent excitation affects your bodily functions, such as blood pressure, pulse, hormone functioning, and makes your immune system more vulnerable.

So what should we do?

When a strong feeling starts growing inside you, don't try to suppress it, instead - let it out! It is up to you whether you will do that by engaging in sports, art, or something else, as long as it helps you let the emotion out, and doesn't do harm to anybody else.

Be aware of your feeling but don't saturate it with mental content, don't turn it into something bigger than what it is, by overthinking. The feeling of peace and inner equilibrium, rather than strong and unstable emotions, is an indicator of mental health.

Comparison to Others

Often turns into self-criticism, self-devaluation, envy, dissatisfaction, and depression. Everyone is different. Comparing yourself to others is easy, however, comparing yourself to your previous versions is brave.

Rather than comparing yourself to others, you can benefit from asking questions, such as:

"How much more productive am I today, compared to yesterday?" "Am I more empathetic now, than I was a couple of years ago?"

Self-comparison can motivate you, while the comparison to others will likely leave you feeling inadequate or hopeless. Learned hopelessness is negativity's middle name.

Whenever you get the urge to compare yourself to someone else, instead think about what you did yesterday, and think how you can be a better version of yourself today.