

Productivity break

Strengthening positive emotions



Stress affects perception and memory via automatic processes. This allows us to react quickly in everyday life. Sometimes, however, these processes also create additional stress. For example, we remember negative events more strongly. Problems are often generalized, overrated, and taken personally. At the same time, under stress we often underestimate our abilities and resources. This results in negative emotions.

Under negative emotions we therefore often focus on problems and lose sight of the solution. This has a negative effect on our well-being and our ability to shift perspective.

You can actively interrupt a downward spiral. First, create awareness of your emotions. Second, consciously focus on positive things and enhance your positive mood. You can strengthen positive emotions with the following three exercises.

Exercise 1 – Be aware of your emotions

Have a daily self-reflection, how you feel. The first six in the list represent so called basic emotions, which are cultural universal. Feel free to add emotions.

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Compassion | <input type="checkbox"/> Affection | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness | <input type="checkbox"/> Gratitude | <input type="checkbox"/> Despair | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disgust | <input type="checkbox"/> Joylessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Shame | <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Envy | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Displeasure | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surprise | <input type="checkbox"/> Trust | <input type="checkbox"/> Disgust | <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joy | <input type="checkbox"/> Security | <input type="checkbox"/> Courage | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiasm | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luck | <input type="checkbox"/> Serenity | <input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity | <input type="checkbox"/> Confidence | |

Chose an emotion. When did you feel this emotion the last time?

Why did you feel it?





Exercise 2 – Make positive things visible

Typically, we experience both positive as well as negative things each day. However, sometimes we only seem to remember the negative things – especially when we are in a bad mood. To avoid forgetting or overlooking the positive and motivating events, take some time to remember and memorize them.

- Daily self-reflection:** Take some minutes and think about all the positive events of the day, e. g. in the evening while brushing your teeth or by collecting Post-its on your desk.
- Collect cents:** Put some coins in your right pants pocket. Every time you experience something positive put it in the left pocket. At the end of the day take all coins from your left pocket and think back to the positive events.



Exercise 3 – Positive impulses from your memory and activities

Your memory offers a whole lot of positive thoughts. However, sometimes they are a somewhat hidden. To uncover them again, please think about the following questions:

- Which (small) positive thing did you experience recently?
- Take two minutes to remember your last vacation, trip or nice conversation with friends.
- What makes you smile?
- Tell your colleagues about positive news, good experiences or interesting things you saw.



Finally, positive emotions result from positive experiences – what positive activity do you plan for today?

Literature:

Luethi, M., Meier, B., & Sandi, C. (2009). Stress effects on working memory, explicit memory, and implicit memory for neutral and emotional stimuli in healthy men. *Frontiers in behavioral neuroscience*, 2, 5.

Coles, N. A., Larsen, J. T., Lench, H. C. (2019). A meta-analysis of the facial feedback literature: Effects of facial feedback on emotional experience are small and variable. *Psychological Bulletin*. doi: 10.1037/bul0000194

