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10 Common Mistakes That Prevent You From Being Happy and Healthy Today, Backed by Science

I'm fascinated by the link between the way we live our daily lives and the health and happiness we enjoy.

There are choices that you make every day, some of which seem completely unrelated to your health and happiness, that dramatically impact the way you feel mentally and physically.

With that said, here are 10 common mistakes that can prevent you from being happy and healthy, and the science to back them up.

1. Avoiding deep and meaningful connections (like marriage, close friendships, and staying in touch with family)

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Ultimately, the human experience is about connecting with other people. Connection is what provides value and meaning to our lives. We're wired for it and research proves just that.

For example, people with strong social ties were found to be healthier and have a lower risk of death (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/425958>).

Additionally, it was found that as age increases, the people with stronger social ties tend to live longer (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15965141>). And it seems that friendships can even help you fight cancer (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2224168>).

The benefits of deep relationships extend to marriage as well. Being in a long-term relationship decreases the risk of depression, suicide, and substance abuse (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21200073>). And one study of almost 6,000 people (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16905719>) found that marriage led to increased longevity while never marrying was the strongest predictor of premature death.

Finally, multiple studies (here <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11710357>), here <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16611700>), and here <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2822182/>) show that strong family ties are one of the primary reasons the people of Okinawa, Japan have incredible longevity despite being one of the poorest prefectures in the country.

What do all of these different studies tell us?

Connection and belonging are essential for a healthy and happy life. Whether it's friendship, marriage, or family — humans need close connections to be healthy.

For more about the connection between loneliness and health, I suggest reading the New York Times best-seller *Mind Over Medicine* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/mind-over-medicine>), which was written by Dr. Lissa Rankin.

2. Sitting all day.

You might want to stand up for this. It turns out that sitting all day has more harmful effects than you might expect.

The short version is that “recreational sitting” like sitting in front of a TV screen increases your risk of cardiovascular disease and death, regardless of your physical activity. Obviously, sitting at a desk for work isn't too good either.

This troubling data doesn't come from small sample sizes either. These trends held true in one study with 4,500 people (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21232666>), another with 8,800 people (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20065160>), and a final one with over 240,000 participants (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22218159>). If you're looking for more details on the health risks of sitting, this New York Times article (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17sitting-t.html>) covers some of the basics.

3. Never stopping to just breathe.

A few years ago, I was speaking with a yoga instructor who told me, “I think people love my class because it’s the only time in their entire day when they just sit and breathe.”

That provides some interesting food for thought. From the time you wake up until the time you go to bed, do you ever take 15 minutes to just sit and breathe? I rarely do. And that's a shame because the benefits of mindfulness and meditation are huge. Meditation reduces stress and anxiety (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2848393/>). Meditation improves your quality of life and boost your immune system (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2921566/>). Meditation has been shown to decrease anger and improve sleep, even among prison inmates (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19477811>).

4. Not joining a religion – or otherwise becoming part of a community.

There is an interesting and growing body of medical research that has discovered the positive health effects of religion and spirituality. The science doesn't necessarily say that there is anything inherently healthy about religion, but it's all the by-products that come from practicing religion that can make a big difference.

For example, people with strong faith often release control of their struggles and worries to a higher power, which can help to relieve anxiety and stress. Religious groups also offer a strong source of community and friendships, which is critical for health and happiness. In many cases, the strength of friendships formed with fellow believers can last for decades, and those strong personal ties are crucial for long-term health.

If you don't consider yourself to be a religious person, then the lesson to takeaway from this body of research is that we all need a sense of belonging and community in our lives. It's important to share your beliefs (whatever they happen to be

about) with a community of people. People who have a community like that to lean on find themselves happier and healthier than those who lack that type of support.

As a starting point, you can read studies on the religion-health connection here (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11308034>), here (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9813743>), and here (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11906445>).

5. Ignoring your creative abilities.

Expressing yourself creatively reduces the risk of disease and illness while simultaneously strengthening your health and wellness. For example, this study (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2804629/>) from the Harvard School of Public Health revealed that art helps to reduce stress and anxiety, increase positive emotions, and reduce the likelihood of depression, along with many other benefits.

Another study (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15039514>), which was published in the Journal of Biobehavioral Medicine, discovered that creative writing improved the immune system response of HIV patients. For more ideas on why creating art is healthy, read this: [The Health Benefits of Creativity](https://jamesclear.com/make-more-art) (<https://jamesclear.com/make-more-art>).

6. Spending all day indoors.

Exploring the world around you — whether that means traveling to faraway lands or hiking through the woods in your area — provides a wide range of mental and physical benefits. For starters, the benefits of sunlight (and the negative effects of

artificial light) are well-documented in research (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2290997/>).

Additionally, researchers have begun to discover that wilderness excursions — known as “adventure therapy” — can promote weight loss (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16158087>), improve the self-esteem of people with mental illness (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23828947>), and even reduce the rearrest rates of sex offenders (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20390776>).

The central theme that runs through all of these studies is that exploring the outdoors and spending time in nature can increase the confidence you have in yourself and improve your ability to interact with others.

7. Spending your time consuming instead of contributing.

Contribution is an essential part of living a life that is happy, healthy, and meaningful. Too often we spend our lives consuming the world around us instead of creating it. We overdose on low quality information. We live sedentary lives and passively eat, watch, and soak up information rather than creating, contributing, and building our own things.

When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

As I wrote in this article (<https://jamesclear.com/short-unimportant-life>)...

“You can’t control the amount of time you spend on this planet, but you can control what you contribute while you’re here. These contributions don’t have to be major endeavors. Cook a meal instead of buying one. Play a game instead of watching one. Write a paragraph instead of reading one. You don’t have to create big contributions, you just need to live out small ones each day.”

8. Working in a job that you don't love.

As you might expect, it's dangerous to work too much. In Japan, the overtime and workplace stress has become so bad that they actually have a label for the people who die because of it: *karoshi*, which literally means “death by overwork.”

Basically any way in which your job makes you feel stressed is bad for your health — unpredictable commutes, tension and disagreement with your boss or coworkers, feeling undervalued or unappreciated. Even working overtime increases the risk for coronary heart disease

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20460389>), independent of outside factors.

What can you do about it? No one strategy will work for everyone, of course, but the principles in *The Happiness Advantage* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/the-happiness-advantage>) by Shawn Achor offer a great place to start.

9. Eating alone.

Brian Wansink, a Cornell professor and author of *Mindless Eating* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/mindless-eating>), has written that when people eat alone they are more likely to have a large binge feeding. Additionally, diets suffer when people eat alone. Lonely diners tend to eat fewer vegetables and less healthy meals. It seems that we make less of an effort to eat well when we are by ourselves than when someone else is involved.

Given that an estimated one out of three people eat lunch at their desk (<http://www.right.com/news-and-events/press-releases/2011-press-releases/item21650.aspx>), it's easy to see how these little choices add up to big health problems over the long-term.

10. Believing that you are unworthy of health, happiness, and love.

Brene Brown is a researcher at the University of Houston and she has spent 10 years studying vulnerability. In recent years, her work has exploded with popularity as she delivered one of the most popular TED Talks (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>) of all-time and has written multiple best-selling books including *Daring Greatly* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/daring-greatly>) and *The Gifts of Imperfection* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/the-gifts-of-imperfection>).

As Brown studied fear, uncertainty, and vulnerability, she discovered one key insight...

“There was only one variable that separated the people who have a strong sense of love and belonging and the people who struggle for it. And that was that people who have a strong sense of love and belonging believe they’re worthy of love and belonging.

That’s it. They believe they’re worthy. The one thing that keeps us out of connection is the fear that we’re not worthy of connection.”

—Brene Brown

If you allow your fear or vulnerability or shame to prevent you from showcasing your true self, then you will be preventing yourself from connecting fully with others. If you want to be able to move past fear, judgement, and uncertainty and into a healthier and happier life, then you have to give yourself permission first. You have to decide that you're worthy.

For much deeper and more useful discussion of vulnerability, I suggest reading Brown's books: *Daring Greatly* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/daring-greatly>) and *The Gifts of Imperfection* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/the-gifts-of-imperfection>).

What Do You Need to Be Healthy?

Living a healthy life is about much more than just diet and exercise. Don't forget about the 10 areas above because they play a significant role in your health and happiness.

As Lissa Rankin often says, “What does your body need to heal?”

In many cases it's not a better diet or a new workout program, it's one of these areas that might be impacting your health and happiness without you even realizing it.



Thanks for reading. You helped save a life.

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With each donation, AMF distributes nets to protect children, pregnant mothers, and families from mosquitos carrying malaria. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to extend life and fulfills my bigger mission to spread healthy habits and help others realize their full potential.

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