

Becky's corner: Finding and keeping joy in our lives

By Becky Ruppert, RN, MS, OCN, Salem Health Radiation Oncology

Finding joy in these challenging times is, in itself, a challenge. But it can be done. Check out the following ideas. You might be surprised about how much better you feel.

Listen to your favorite music

It can help you recall positive memories, and provide an escape from the day-to-day difficulties you may be facing. Recalling these memories by listening to music is an easy and passive way to boost your mood while you're working, cleaning, or just hanging out at home. Research shows listening to your favorite jams can reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, improve sleep quality, and enhance mood, too.

Develop a daily gratitude practice

It doesn't have to be a big ordeal; just think of one to three simple statements a day such as, "I am grateful I have a roof over my head," or "I am grateful for the sun that rises each morning that I feel on my skin," or "I am grateful for the delicious strawberries I had today."

At the end of each day, write in a journal or say aloud the things you were grateful for, as simple as they may be. By doing this, even during the most difficult or distressing times, your gratitude practice will help bring your circumstances into perspective, indirectly create joy, and keep you grounded.

Spend time in a vision practice

Close your eyes and focus on your very favorite place, person, mantra, prayer, or even vacation. Breathe into the moment and envision yourself in this space or situation. Consider the colors, tastes, textures, and conversations. Try to spend a dedicated five minutes soaking in the moment, slowing down your breathing and relaxing your body.

Some people find that this practice is enhanced either by laying down with bolsters under the legs and a weighted blanket on top of the body – or by sitting in a chair with a cushion behind the back and under the feet. **Meditating** regularly in this way can help remind you that aspects of the COVID-19 situation – such as isolation, sadness, and desperation – are temporary. You will once again have more positive experiences, and these short meditations may even help you create new ones.

Seek "awe" moments every day

Awe is the concept of experiencing wonder and amazement. Researchers are finding if we take the time to notice small, pleasurable moments every day, we can reap the same benefits. Awe moments can be found in seeing the sunrise, for example, or watching ants march. We can also experience awe by reading beautiful poetry or hiking on a new path and seeing interesting rocks or flowers.

Take the time to notice things around you that you may have taken for granted. By relishing them and their place in the world (and yours), you can derive more meaning from your life, feel more connected to the world at large, and experience more joy in

the day to day. Live in the moment, slow down so those awe moments can be fully experienced.

Help others experience joy

Helping others is one of the best ways to feel happier and healthier yourself. When they feel joy, you will, too.

- **Send letters, poems, or drawings to first responders, essential workers, or elderly people who are sheltered in-place.** By engaging in this activity, you are bringing a sense of comfort and joy to others and giving yourself a feeling of fulfillment for having passed on some happiness to others. Additionally, it can help shift your attention away from your own day-to-day struggles and the heaviness you may be feeling.
- **Start collecting spare change or a small amount of money every day, with the intention of donating it to a charity of your choice.** At the end of a designated period of time (one to three months), write a letter to the charity letting them know what you did, why, and the meaning behind the donation. Saving the money and seeing the fruits of your labor will spark joy that you were able to meet a goal. Additionally, by writing a letter you'll be able to express your intentions of goodwill to another. Oftentimes, when we voice our positivity instead of keeping it inside, we can further feel joy throughout our soul.
- **Run an errand for a friend or order food for them.** Helping others with even something small can be a big stress reducer right now. They will be so thankful – and from their gratitude, you'll experience a sense of joy – as will they.

As you can see, experiencing joy, even in light of all the difficulties we are facing at this time both personally and collectively, can be achieved by some easy modifications to our day-to-day activities.