

Making Life Sweeter:

What to do when life's got you bitter

Life can be harsh and the negative experiences can add up, making you feel bitter and resentful. You might conclude your whole life is miserable and sour.

When life feels bitter, you can tell yourself you need to stop being so negative, angry, sad, or upset. Stopping these feelings can be like trying not to think about a pink elephant. The more you remind yourself what you shouldn't be thinking, the more time you spend engaged with that topic.

Instead of trying to stop the negativity, try adding something new to the mix. Consider that you can't take out a seasoning from a pot of soup once it's been added! But you can fix the taste of the soup by adding ingredients that make the pot more tasty.

WHEN LIFE'S GOT YOU BITTER... ADD A LITTLE...

COMPASSION

Show kindness and deep concern for your struggles and suffering and make an effort, no matter how small, to make things better.

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance takes the fight out of the situation and allows things to be as they are.

CREATIVITY

This is a form of play that allows you to discover something new and/or express yourself, both the good and the bad.

GENTLENESS

When life is hard, the last thing you need is a beating. Try being gentle with your struggling self.

SUPPORT

Reach out and let someone help you. Just talking about your struggle can lighten the load.

CURIOSITY

This is an antidote to judgment. It allows you to explore yourself and your circumstance with an openness to learning.

GRATITUDE

Appreciate what you do have. Find something good in your life and notice, appreciate, and celebrate it.

EXPERIMENTATION

Allow yourself to risk, to be imperfect, and to explore something new.



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Savoring the Moment

Savoring is a way to take an active role in deriving pleasure and fulfillment in the midst of a positive experience. Savoring allows you to step outside yourself to see, feel, review, and appreciate your experience—resulting in increased joy and meaning. In savoring, you not only enjoy an experience but you also enjoy that you are enjoying that experience!



BENEFITS OF SAVORING

- Increases noticing and awareness
- Intensifies any pleasant experience
- Keeps your attention on a good thing a bit longer to lengthen your positive feelings
- Reinforces your capacity to bring and hold goodness in your life
- Increases positive mental health and buffers against stress
- Increases joy and happiness

STEPS TO FOLLOW TO SAVOR

- 1. Find a positive experience to truly savor** every day
Maybe it's a warm cup of tea, beautiful object in nature, scrumptious thing to eat, refreshing shower, connection with a good friend, or a beautiful poem. Do this **now**.
- 2. Feel into the experience.** What's good here? What do you like about this? Why does this make you happy? What's happening in your body? What sensations are you aware of? **How** does it feel?
- 3. Reflect and notice yourself doing this activity.** Be amazed and delighted that it's happening. **Wow!**



Explore More: *Savoring: A New Model of Positive Experience* by Bryant & Veroff, 2007.

ENHANCE SAVORING

1. Consider **sharing your savoring experience** with someone else. Research shows that telling others about your savored experiences increases the joy and positive effect of the experience (Gable, et al, 2004; Langston, 1994).
2. **Feel into the complexity** of the experience. Notice different perceptual elements and multiple sensory inputs.
3. **Find words** for both your internal and external experience.
4. Find a situation **free from social or esteem needs** as motivators.
5. Imagine this might be the **last time** you will ever experience this.
6. **Slow down** so you can notice the smaller units of what is being experienced. Notice more detail of both surroundings and of self.
7. **Recall and review your savored experience** in the future. Remembering a positive experience in an embodied way increases positive emotion for as many as four weeks after recall (Lyubmirsky, et al, 2006).

WHAT TO AVOID

- Some actions can hurt or diminish a savoring experience.
1. **Focusing on the future**, thinking about what it will be like when the savoring experience is over.
 2. Reminding yourself, in the midst of a savoring experience, that the **experience will soon end**. Telling yourself, "Nothing good lasts forever."
 3. **Comparing the current experience with past** experiences and finding your current experience lacking in some way.
 4. Telling yourself **things will never be this good again**. Missing it before it's even gone.
 5. Looking for how the **current situation could be better** or improved. "This would be even better if..."
 6. **Telling yourself you don't really deserve**, or you don't have time for, a savoring moment.



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Stages of Change



The Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM), researched by Prochaska and others, examines and explains two decades of research on intentional change. The TTM found individuals move through a series of six stages in the adoption of healthy behaviors or the cessation of unhealthy ones. This handout offers a summary of the stages outlined in the book, ***Changing for Good***, by Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente.

PRE-CONTEMPLATION STAGE

This is the stage in which an individual has no intent to change behavior in the near future. Pre-contemplators are often characterized as resistant or unmotivated and tend to avoid information, discussion, or thoughts about changing their behavior or their environment. They lack awareness that life can be improved by such a change. They might prefer to have others change instead of themselves. This stage can be called “denial.”

CONTEMPLATION STAGE

Individuals in this stage can see that there is a problem and openly state an intention to change in the near future, generally within six months. They are aware of the benefits of changing, but they remain keenly aware of the costs. This is a stage of information gathering about solutions and actions. Contemplators are often seen as ambivalent or as procrastinators, because change is only planned, not yet acted upon. Substituting thinking for action can make one a “chronic contemplator.” Movement will begin when the focus shifts from **problems** in the present or past to **solutions** and the future.

PREPARATION STAGE

This is the stage in which individuals intend to take steps to change, usually within the next month. Preparation is viewed as a transitional rather than stable stage, moving from intention into action, but is a hugely important stage. Fifty percent of the people who attempt behavior change and skip this stage will relapse within 21 days, according to Prochaska.

ACTION STAGE

The action stage is one in which an individual has made overt, and perceptible lifestyle modifications for fewer than six months. This stage requires considerable commitment of time and energy.

MAINTENANCE STAGE

Individuals in the maintenance stage have made changes to modify their behavior, experiences, or environment in order to overcome their problems. They are now working to prevent relapse and to consolidate gains secured during action. Maintainers report the highest levels of self-efficacy and are less frequently tempted to relapse.

TERMINATION STAGE

Individuals in the termination stage see the problem behavior as in the past and no longer in need of attention.

WHAT STAGE OF CHANGE ARE YOU IN?

To assess your stage, answer the following questions:

1. I solved my problem more than six months ago. Yes/No
2. I have taken action on my problem within the past six months. Yes/No
3. I am intending to take action in the next month. Yes/No
4. I am intending to take action in the next six months. Yes/No

All ‘No’ responses = Pre-contemplation
‘No’ on questions 1, 2, & 3 = Contemplation
‘No’ on 1 & 2 only = Preparation
‘No’ on 1 only = Action
All ‘Yes’ responses = Maintenance

