

PLAY MORE! 11 Ways
to Add Spark to Your Life

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It's Playtime!

11

ways to
take time for
what matters

Children play. Nobody has to tell them to make time for it. But as adults, we can forget what play is, how vital it is, and even how FUN it is! Here are tips to bring play into your daily life and refresh your outlook.

By Elisha and Stefanie Goldstein

1. Take a Play History

Drum up those old playful feelings you've lost over years of adulthood by taking a moment to reflect on how you played as a kid: Did you play mostly by yourself, or with friends (or furry friends)? What made you feel free, so you'd lose track of time and truly engage in the moment? Maybe you created imaginary worlds or had invisible friends or built sandcastles on the beach. As you think about this, notice if the feeling of play arises. If you notice a smile, let it linger.

2. Be a Playmaker

Having a playful life means choosing right here, right now to actively engage in play on a regular basis. What we choose to do makes a big impact on our health and happiness. Do you explore, learn, look for new experiences, travel, or spend time with people who nourish you? If you choose to be an active playmaker, you'll not only have a lot more fun—science shows you may be tapping into the fountain of youth.

3. Collect Your Toys

Playing the game *Trouble* may not feel as playful now as it did when you were a kid (then again, it might). So it's important to think about what things bring you joy. Consider activities that take very little effort, and some that take more effort. Maybe it's cooking new foods, doing yoga, riding horses, visiting a trendy neighborhood, kissing, hiking, flying kites, playing a musical instrument, putting on sexy clothes, or looking through art books. Collect a list of your toys and then plan a playdate.

4. Make a Playdate

Why should kids get to have all the fun?! Play isn't a habit for most adults, so it's important to intentionally make time for it in our lives—and that means scheduling playdates for ourselves, whether solo or with a friend. Just like you schedule your days with responsibilities, workouts, meditations, and to-do lists, playdates equally deserve a recurring space on your calendar. →



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5. Find a Playmate

For many of us life is more fun when we have someone to do things with. Who can you recruit to be your partner in your mission to bring play back?

6. Bring Some Attitude

Steve Gross' title at the Life is Good Kids Foundation is "Chief Playmaker"—how cool is that? His entire job revolves around play because research has found play to be one of the greatest resiliency factors for kids. "Play is not reserved for the sandbox, it's not reserved for flip flops, beer pong, or Frisbee golf," Gross says. "We can bring it into everything we do." Bring a playful mindset to whatever you're doing and you can make even the hardest of work feel fun.

7. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

And as the late Richard Carlson famously said, "It's all small stuff!" With that said, being playful can be difficult when faced with all of the very real

responsibilities we deal with every day. Without minimizing the weight of these issues, we can begin relating to them differently. We spend so much of our sacred time worrying and stressing about what happened or what might happen and we become so tightly wound that even in quiet moments it can feel nearly impossible to settle and relax into them. See if you can keep coming back to your present moment experience—returning to what you know is real and true right now.

8. Laugh More

No, seriously. Laugh! More! Not only does it actually feel good, it also releases the good-feeling vibes of our old friend cortisol. Some say it even helps strengthen your abdominal muscles. Watch a comedy, find a laughter yoga class near you, tell some jokes, and if you can't seem to find anything funny then think of something that made you laugh in the past and let yourself relive it. Or you can just smile—but be careful...smiling has been known to lead to laughter.

A BOX OF SIMPLE ADVICE

Let It Linger

One thing we want to keep in mind when playing is to let the experience linger, even if just for a few seconds. Whether you're eating a treat, engaging in your favorite crossword puzzle, or out on a walk with a friend, take in the moment fully and sense how it feels in your body. Be curious about the experience knowing that engaging novelty is one of

the best drivers of neuroplastic change. As you do this, you're also stamping a memory of the experience that the brain can reference to bring an attitude of play into other areas of your life. As you linger in the experience and emotions that arise when you play, the firing continues for a longer period of time, giving the brain a better opportunity to water the seeds of joy.



10. Be a Kid Again

Studies show that when you put yourself in youthful environments it impacts your mind and body. Fly a kite, swing on swings, play tag, throw the ball around. It may seem silly (and even uncomfortable at first) but if you surrender to the experience you might just find yourself smiling!

9. Find Small Ways to Love Yourself

Sometimes it's not so easy to play, especially when we're out of practice. We have to learn to take it easy on ourselves and find small ways to love ourselves. When things get tough, try a self-compassion break: Take a deep breath, place your hand on your stomach or heart, take a walk, or soak for a while in the tub (and remember to bring the rubber duckies).

11. Take Time for Yourself

Many of us put ourselves last on our priority list, and setting aside time to do things you enjoy can feel indulgent. But taking time each week to do something YOU enjoy—that's just living a happy, mindful life. ●

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