

HOW HAPPINESS HAPPENS

Find things that make you happy. Do more of that.

By Debbie Schwarm

38 Hertz



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How Happiness Happens

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Website: <https://38hertz.com>

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book is not a program.

It is not a challenge.

It is not something you need to keep up with or complete.

This is a book meant to be opened, closed, returned to, and forgotten about and then found again when you need it.

You don't need to read it in order.

You don't need to do everything.

You don't need to do anything at all.

Reading counts.

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INTRODUCTION

What This Book Is Really About

Most of us learn, directly or indirectly, that happiness is something that comes later after things calm down, after we get organized, after life looks different. We wait for it, plan for it, and sometimes feel frustrated when it doesn't arrive.

But happiness rarely shows up that way.

More often, it appears quietly, in ordinary moments that are easy to miss. It shows up when we're already living our lives not when everything is fixed, but when something small feels right.

Over time, I started noticing that when I felt better, calmer, lighter, more like myself, I was usually doing the same kinds of things. Not impressive things. Not productive things. Ordinary things that didn't look important on the outside.

That noticing led to one simple idea:

Find things that make you happy. Do more of that.

This book is a collection of places where happiness tends to happen. Not rules. Not instructions. Just patterns you may recognize in your own life.

SECTION I – Happy Health

How Happiness Happens in the Body

Happiness often begins with the body, even though we tend to look elsewhere. When life feels overwhelming, the body usually wants comfort before insight, and care before change. These pages aren't about improving your health. They're about listening to it.



Drink Something Warm

The idea

Make a cup of tea, coffee, or warm water and drink it on purpose. This doesn't need to be quiet or intentional. It can happen while standing at the counter or in the middle of a busy day.

Why this works

Warmth is one of the simplest signals of comfort. When you're stressed or tired, your nervous system often responds better to physical reassurance than mental effort. Warmth doesn't solve problems but it can soften the moment enough to make the rest of the day feel more manageable.

What gets in the way

Small comforts often get skipped because they don't feel productive, or because we think they only "count" if we slow down and do them properly.

Permission

You don't need to finish the cup. You don't need to sit down. One sip counts. Comfort doesn't require follow-through.



Step Outside Briefly

The idea

Step outside for a moment and let your body register a change in space. This might be a porch, a doorway, a balcony, or simply standing near an open window. The point isn't distance or duration, but contrast.

Why this works

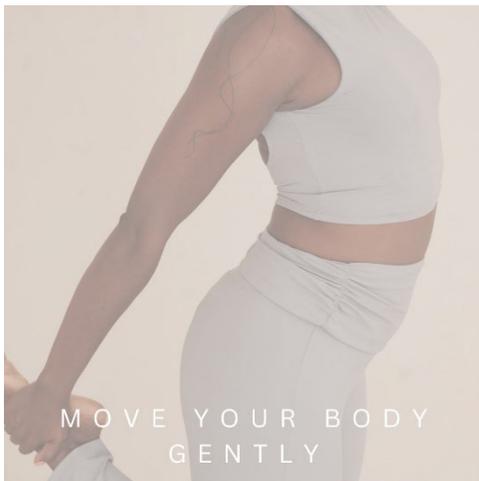
Changing your environment even slightly can interrupt mental loops and reset your senses. When you step outside, your attention is pulled outward by light, air, temperature, or sound. This shift gives the mind something real to respond to, which can quiet rumination and bring you back into the present moment. Fresh air helps, but so does simply noticing where you are instead of staying inside your thoughts.

What gets in the way

We often assume that stepping outside needs to turn into a walk, an errand, or a decision. That expectation adds pressure and makes the idea feel bigger than it needs to be, so we skip it altogether.

Permission

Standing still is enough. You don't need to go anywhere or stay long. You can go right back inside.



Move Your Body Gently

The idea

Move your body in a way that feels manageable today. This might be stretching, standing up, changing how you're sitting, rolling your shoulders, or walking a short distance without a destination or plan.

Why this works

Gentle movement reminds the body that it's part of the day, not something you have to push through or override. When the body has been still for long periods, tension and fatigue can build quietly. Small movements help release that tension, support circulation, and bring awareness back into the physical self without demanding motivation or energy.

What gets in the way

Movement often gets confused with exercise, goals, or self-improvement. When it feels tied to expectations or outcomes, it can become intimidating or easy to avoid.

Permission

This is not exercise. There is no right amount. Thinking about moving counts, and stopping early still matters.



Breathe Slowly Once

The idea

Take one slow, intentional breath, letting the inhale and exhale complete themselves without controlling the rhythm or trying to do it correctly.

Why this works

A single intentional breath can change the tone of a moment. It introduces a pause where there was none, creating a brief interruption in urgency or mental momentum. This isn't about calming down or fixing how you feel; it's about giving the nervous system a moment of space to register safety.

What gets in the way

We often assume breathing needs technique, repetition, or a specific outcome to be effective. That expectation turns a simple act into another thing to get right.

Permission

One breath is enough. There's nothing to continue or improve.



Wash Your Face on Purpose

The idea

Wash your face and notice the sensation of water and touch as it happens. This doesn't require slowing down or turning it into a ritual just allowing the experience to register instead of moving through it automatically.

Why this works

Sensory experiences bring attention back into the body and out of mental loops. Water, temperature, and touch are immediate and grounding, giving the nervous system something real to respond to. This kind of attention can steady a moment without effort or analysis.

What gets in the way

Routine tasks are easy to rush through or mentally skip over, especially when the mind is already busy elsewhere.

Permission

This isn't skincare. It's attention.



Sit in the Sun

The idea

Sit or stand where natural light reaches you, even briefly. This can be sunlight through a window, light falling across a room, or a moment spent facing brightness without doing anything else.

Why this works

Natural light influences circadian rhythm, alertness, and emotional regulation in subtle but meaningful ways. Even short exposure can help the

body orient itself in time, reduce mental fog, and gently lift energy without requiring effort or intention.

What gets in the way

We tend to assume this needs to be planned, outdoors, or part of a routine. When life feels busy or unstructured, small moments of light are easy to overlook or dismiss as not enough.

Permission

A window counts. A pause counts. A few seconds of light are still real contact with the day.



Go to Bed a Little Earlier

The idea

Go to bed five minutes earlier than usual, or choose to lie down sooner than you normally would, without trying to change your sleep or make the night more productive.

Why this works

Rest is not only about sleep quality; it is also about how the day ends. Choosing rest even slightly earlier signals care to a tired nervous system and creates a gentler transition out of the day. It

allows the body to settle without the pressure of fixing fatigue or achieving better sleep.

What gets in the way

We often wait for the “right” night to rest when everything is finished, when we feel calm, or when sleep seems more likely. That perfect night rarely arrives, so rest keeps getting postponed.

Permission

Five minutes is enough. Lying down counts. Closing your eyes still counts.

SECTION II – Happy Hacks

How Happiness Happens Through Small Shifts: Happy Hacks

Sometimes happiness doesn't come from changing yourself. It comes from changing the moment. When stress or fatigue is present, asking yourself to think differently often adds pressure. Changing the moment even slightly gives relief without self-correction. Find something small to do.



Light a Candle

The idea

Light a candle while you do something ordinary. You don't need to pause, set a mood, or change what you're doing. The candle exists alongside the moment, not instead of it.

Why this works

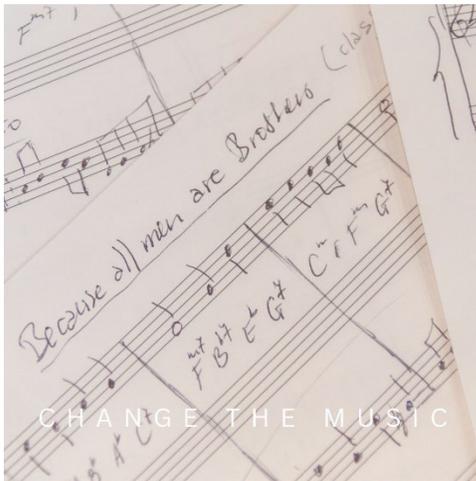
Small rituals create a subtle sense of presence without asking for focus or effort. A candle introduces warmth, movement, and softness into a moment that might otherwise feel flat or rushed. It marks time gently, reminding you that something is happening *now*, without demanding that you reflect on it or make meaning out of it.

What gets in the way

We often believe rituals require intention, quiet, or the right emotional state. When life feels busy or messy, we dismiss them as unnecessary or not worth doing “halfway.”

Permission

You don't need to notice anything special. You don't need to feel calm or reflective. Lighting it is enough.



Change the Music

The idea

Change what you're listening to, even if the sound stays in the background. This can mean switching songs, changing a playlist, turning music on where there was none, or turning it off when silence feels better.

Why this works

Sound influences mood and energy almost immediately, often without conscious awareness. Rhythm, tone, and familiarity can soften tension, increase focus, or shift the emotional temperature of a space. Even when you aren't actively listening, sound shapes how time passes and how a moment feels.

What gets in the way

We tend to wait for the "right" song or the right mood, as if the change needs to be meaningful or perfectly matched. When we can't decide, we do nothing, even though any shift would help.

Permission

Any change counts. You don't have to find the perfect song for it to work.



Tidy One Small Thing

The idea

Tidy one small surface or contained area, such as a table, a drawer, or a corner of a room. Choose something with clear edges and stop when that single space is done.

Why this works

Containment reduces mental noise. When life feels scattered, completing one clearly defined space creates a sense of order that the mind can register quickly. It offers relief without triggering the overwhelm that often comes from trying to fix everything at once.

What gets in the way

We often assume that once we start tidying, we should keep going until everything is finished. That expectation turns a helpful action into a heavy one, so we avoid starting at all.

Permission

Stopping after one thing is allowed. A single finished space is enough to matter.



Do Something Out of Order

The idea

Change the usual order of something familiar, even in a small or barely noticeable way. This might involve shifting when you do something, where you start, or how you move through a routine.

Why this works

Routine is efficient, but it can also dull attention over time. Small disruptions interrupt autopilot and invite curiosity back into the moment. When attention wakes up, experience often feels lighter and more present without requiring extra energy.

What gets in the way

We depend on routine for stability, even when it has become draining or invisible. Changing it can feel unnecessary or uncomfortable, so we default to what's familiar.

Permission

No explanation is required. You don't have to justify a small change for it to be worthwhile.



Turn Off Notifications Briefly

The idea

Silence notifications for a short period of time, whether that means a few minutes, a single task, or part of an hour. This is a pause, not a decision to disconnect.

Why this works

Constant alerts keep attention in a state of readiness and subtly raise stress, even when

nothing urgent is happening. Turning notifications off briefly creates a pocket of quiet where the nervous system can settle and focus can return, without the pressure of unplugging completely.

What gets in the way

We often fear missing something important or falling behind. That fear can keep us constantly available, even when availability isn't actually required.

Permission

You can turn them back on whenever you want. Nothing is permanent about this choice.



Make Something Slightly Nicer

The idea

Improve one small detail in your environment, even if no one else will notice. This could be as simple as choosing a mug you like, straightening a pillow, or using something you've been saving.

Why this works

Small upgrades communicate care without requiring effort or justification. They remind you that comfort and enjoyment don't have to be earned or delayed. These quiet improvements can shift how a moment feels without changing what you're doing.

What gets in the way

We often save pleasant things for a future moment we imagine will be more deserving. In the meantime, we move through our days surrounded by "good enough," postponing care.

Permission

Now counts. You don't need a better reason or a better day.



Pause Between Tasks

The idea

Pause briefly before starting the next thing, even if the pause is only a few seconds long. Let one task end before the next one begins, without filling the space in between.

Why this works

Transitions are often where stress accumulates.

Moving immediately from one task to the next

keeps the body in a state of urgency, even when nothing is actually pressing. A short pause allows the nervous system to reset and creates a sense of separation, which can make the next moment feel lighter and more manageable.

What gets in the way

We tend to rush through transitions to stay productive or to avoid falling behind. In doing so, we carry the tension of one task directly into the next.

Permission

A moment is enough. You don't need to do anything with the pause for it to matter.

SECTION III – Happy Hobbies

How Happiness Happens When You Do What You Enjoy

This section is about activities that invite you in instead of asking you to try harder. These are things you might do for a few minutes, set down, and return to later or not at all.

When you follow what you enjoy, even briefly, attention settles and the mind quiets without effort. Happiness often shows up there not as a reward for discipline, but as a natural byproduct of curiosity and engagement.



Work on a Puzzle or Game

The idea

Spend a few minutes on a puzzle or game, without deciding how long you'll stay with it or whether you'll finish. This can be something simple, familiar, or even something you've already started before.

Why this works

Focused play gently absorbs attention and gives the mind something concrete to engage with. Because there is no real-world consequence to the outcome, the nervous system can relax while attention stays occupied. This combination often creates calm without effort or pressure.

What gets in the way

We tend to treat play as something that should lead to progress, completion, or improvement. When it feels unproductive, we dismiss it as a waste of time.

Permission

Stopping early counts. Leaving something unfinished does not reduce its value.



Listen to a Favorite Song

The idea

Listen to a song you already love, one you've heard many times before and don't need to concentrate on. Let it play in the background or give it your full attention, whatever feels right in the moment.

Why this works

Familiar music activates comfort and emotional memory without requiring effort. The brain recognizes what's coming next, which can create a sense of safety and ease. Joy does not lose its impact through repetition; familiarity often deepens it.

What gets in the way

We tend to chase novelty, assuming something new will work better or feel more meaningful. In doing so, we overlook what already reliably brings comfort.

Permission

Repeat is allowed. You don't need a new song for it to work again.



Doodle or Write Casually

The idea

Make marks on paper or write a sentence without deciding what it should become. This can be a few words, a sketch, a list, or lines that don't mean anything at all.

Why this works

Expression without expectation gives thoughts and feelings a place to move instead of staying

contained. When there is no goal or audience, the body and mind can settle into the act itself, which often feels grounding and relieving.

What gets in the way

We often believe creativity needs to result in something worthwhile, finished, or shareable. That belief adds pressure and can prevent us from starting at all.

Permission

Messy counts. Nothing needs to make sense for it to matter.



Take a Photo

The idea

Photograph something ordinary that catches your attention, even briefly. This might be a detail, a light pattern, an object you see every day, or a moment that would normally pass unnoticed.

Why this works

Looking closely changes how you experience a moment. When you frame something through a lens, attention slows and narrows, pulling you into the present. The act of noticing — not the image itself — is what shifts the experience and can make an ordinary moment feel more vivid and real.

What gets in the way

We often assume photos need to be meaningful, beautiful, or shared to have value. That expectation turns noticing into performance and keeps us from engaging at all.

Permission

Private is fine. The photo only needs to exist for you.



Do Something With Your Hands

The idea

Engage in something tactile that uses your hands, without focusing on speed, outcome, or improvement. This could be folding, sorting, cooking, fixing, building, or simply handling objects with attention.

Why this works

Hands-on activity anchors attention in the body and gives the mind something concrete to follow. Physical engagement often quiets mental chatter because the brain is occupied with sensation, movement, and coordination rather than abstract thought.

What gets in the way

We tend to undervalue physical engagement unless it produces something useful or efficient. When the result seems minor, we dismiss the process itself.

Permission

Outcome doesn't matter. The benefit comes from the doing, not the result.



Revisit Something You Used to Like

The idea

Try something you once enjoyed, even if you're unsure how it will feel now. Approach it briefly and lightly, without the expectation that it will recreate a past version of enjoyment.

Why this works

Interest evolves over time, but that doesn't make it meaningless. Revisiting something familiar can reconnect you with a part of yourself without requiring the same response or commitment. Even a small spark of recognition can feel grounding.

What gets in the way

We often expect the same level of enjoyment we once felt. When that feeling doesn't immediately return, we assume the interest no longer matters and abandon it quickly.

Permission

Curiosity is enough. You don't need to feel the same for it to be worthwhile.



Follow a Small Curiosity

The idea

Notice what catches your interest, even if it seems minor or fleeting, and follow it briefly without deciding where it should lead. This might be a question, an image, a thought, or a momentary pull of attention.

Why this works

Curiosity creates energy without force because it arises naturally rather than through obligation. When attention is drawn by interest, the mind engages more easily and effort softens. Even short moments of curiosity can shift mood and create a sense of movement.

What gets in the way

We often dismiss small interests as distractions or assume they aren't worth pursuing unless they lead somewhere useful or productive.

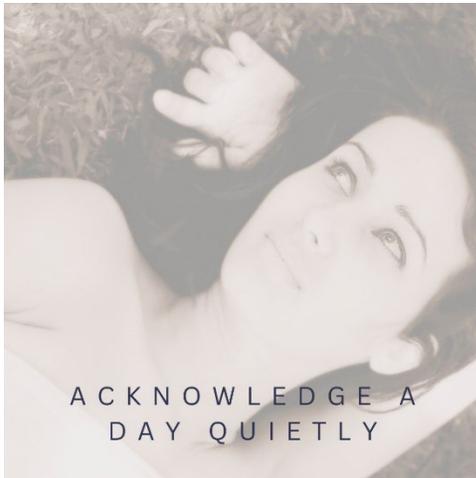
Permission

Questions don't need answers. Curiosity doesn't need a destination to matter.

SECTION IV – Happy Holidays

How Happiness Happens Around Meaning & Time

This section is about noticing meaning without turning it into obligation. Holidays, anniversaries, and seasonal moments often come with expectations about how they should be marked. When those expectations don't match how we actually feel, they can create pressure instead of connection.



Acknowledge a Day Quietly

The idea

Notice a meaningful date as it arrives, without turning it into an event or asking anything of yourself. This might mean simply naming the day to yourself or pausing for a moment of awareness.

Why this works

Recognition allows meaning to exist without effort. When a day carries personal or emotional weight, acknowledging it quietly can provide grounding and a sense of orientation in time, without the pressure of performance or celebration.

What gets in the way

We often feel pressure to *do something* with meaningful dates to mark them, explain them, or make them visible. When we don't have the energy or desire for that, we may avoid acknowledging the day at all.

Permission

Doing nothing counts. Awareness alone is a valid way of honoring what matters.



Mark a Seasonal Change

The idea

Notice changes in light, temperature, or rhythm that signal a shift in season. This can be as simple as feeling a different quality of air, noticing earlier darkness, or seeing something new appear or disappear.

Why this works

Seasons move whether we plan for them or not.

Noticing their passage helps orient us in time and reminds us that change is natural and ongoing. This awareness can feel grounding, especially when life feels static or overwhelming.

What gets in the way

We often associate seasons with plans, traditions, or external markers, and when those are absent, we overlook the shift entirely. Busy routines can also keep us from noticing gradual change as it happens.

Permission

Noticing is participation. You don't need to commemorate the season for it to matter.



Eat a Symbolic Food

The idea

Eat something that holds meaning for you, whether it's tied to a memory, a season, a person, or a feeling. This doesn't need to be traditional, shared, or prepared in any special way.

Why this works

Food connects memory and care in a direct, physical way. Taste and smell can bring a sense of continuity, comfort, or recognition without requiring reflection or explanation. Eating something meaningful can quietly anchor a moment in time.

What gets in the way

We often assume meaningful food needs to follow tradition, be shared with others, or require special effort. When it doesn't meet those expectations, we may dismiss it or decide it doesn't "count."

Permission

Tradition is personal. It doesn't need to look the way it used to or the way anyone else expects.



Remember a Personal Tradition

The idea

Recall something you've done before that once held meaning for you. This might be a habit, a ritual, a holiday moment, or a small way you used to mark time, even if it no longer fits your life.

Why this works

Memory itself can be grounding. Remembering a personal tradition connects you to continuity and identity without requiring action. It allows meaning to exist in reflection alone, which can feel steady when circumstances have changed.

What gets in the way

We often believe traditions only matter if they are ongoing or repeated. When something no longer fits our current life, we may avoid remembering it altogether, as if letting it change somehow diminishes its value.

Permission

You don't have to repeat it. Honoring something in memory does not obligate you to bring it back or keep it going.



Celebrate Something Privately

The idea

Mark an accomplishment, ending, or moment of effort quietly, without sharing it or turning it into an event. This can be as simple as acknowledging it to yourself.

Why this works

Private recognition reinforces self-trust. When you notice your own efforts without seeking validation, the moment belongs fully to you. This kind of acknowledgment can feel stabilizing and affirming, even when the accomplishment feels small.

What gets in the way

We often associate celebration with visibility, approval, or external recognition. When there's no audience, we may minimize our own efforts or assume they don't matter enough to acknowledge.

Permission

No audience required. Recognition does not need witnesses to be real.



Let a Holiday Pass Without Guilt

The idea

Choose rest, neutrality, or quiet instead of participation when a holiday or meaningful day feels like too much. This can mean opting out entirely or engaging in the smallest possible way.

Why this works

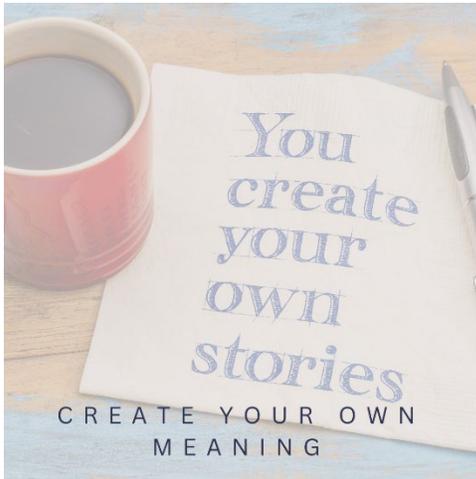
Skipping can be an act of care. Holidays often carry expectations that don't match our emotional capacity, and honoring your limits preserves energy and reduces resentment. Allowing a day to pass without performance respects your reality.

What gets in the way

We often equate participation with obligation and assume that opting out requires justification. Fear of disappointing others or breaking tradition can make rest feel wrong, even when it's needed.

Permission

You're allowed. You don't need to explain, compensate, or make it up later.



Create Your Own Meaning

The idea

Decide for yourself what a moment, day, or experience means to you, independent of how it is labeled or understood by others. Meaning can be personal, provisional, and change over time.

Why this works

Meaning doesn't need agreement to be real. When meaning is chosen rather than inherited or expected, it feels more stable and honest. Defining what matters to you allows experiences to fit your life as it actually is, rather than forcing yourself to fit a script.

What gets in the way

We are often conditioned to look for shared meaning, external validation, or cultural agreement before allowing something to matter. When that approval isn't present, we may question our own interpretations or dismiss them entirely.

Permission

Your definition counts. You don't need consensus or validation for it to matter.



Let the Day Teach You Something

The idea

Pay attention to what a particular day reveals about you, rather than trying to shape or manage the day itself. Notice what comes up, what feels easy or hard, and what draws your attention.

Why this works

Some days carry meaning not because of what happens, but because of what they show us.

Allowing a day to unfold without directing it can offer insight, clarity, or self-understanding that doesn't require action or interpretation in the moment.

What gets in the way

We often feel pressure to control days, optimize them, or make sense of them immediately. That urgency can prevent us from noticing what the day is actually offering in real time.

Permission

You don't have to figure it out today. Awareness can come later.

CLOSING

Happiness doesn't arrive all at once. It isn't something you reach or solve. More often, it shows up in small pieces, moments that pass quietly unless you're paying attention.

Throughout this book, the ideas are intentionally simple. Not because happiness is shallow, but because it tends to appear in ordinary places. When you notice what eases your body, steadies your mind, or softens a moment, you begin to recognize how happiness actually happens in real life.

Repetition matters, not because you need discipline, but because familiarity builds trust. When something works, you're allowed to return to it. You don't need to justify it, improve it, or replace it with something better.

This isn't a book to finish. It's one to come back to. Open it when a day feels heavy, flat, or unclear. Let one small idea be enough.

Once you notice what works, you're allowed to keep choosing it.
