

# A 'Happy Place'

**Y**our 'Happy Place' can be as individualised as your fingerprint. But there are some common components. These include contentment, pleasurable events, anticipation, gratitude, and fulfillment. But what is keeping you from your 'Happy Place'?

## **MYTH 1: THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO BECAUSE THE WORLD IS SO STRESSFUL.**

If there is nothing else you get from this article, get this: you do not have to resign yourself to living stressed out for the rest of your life. You just need to know where your stresses are coming from, where your tools are, and how to use them effectively to tackle the stress.

The big insight from my book, *Highway to Your Happy Place*, is that the majority of human stress is a side effect of our human skills. Humans have the ability to envision the future, but then the side effect is that you worry about what will happen in that future. The implications of this

insight are that 1) you can make better, more efficient tools with better understanding and 2) you can control your skills so although you cannot control what happens to you, you can control how you react to it thereby gaining some sense of control.

## **MYTH 2: GUILT AND REGRET ARE THE SAME THING.**

Guilt and regret are not interchangeable. Guilt is about breaking a law or rule. Regret is about making bad choices.

But guilt and regret do have some similarities. They are negative emotions we try to avoid. They are emotional reactions to some event that has occurred in the past. They are both tools that human societies use to shape our behaviour within the group.

Guilt is the group's way of saying, "Don't do that." It is based on right and wrong. The group could be your religious group that decides what you should worship. We want people in our group to internalise the rules and avoid the punishment of guilt.

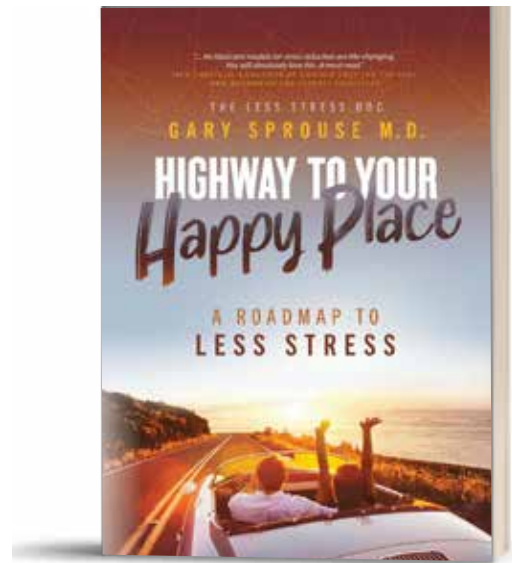
Regret, on the other hand, is about choice. Regret is what occurs when you make a bad choice. You did not break a rule. You made a choice that led to a worse outcome. You picked the wrong line at the checkout counter.

Both of these emotions make people feel bad but there is a way to reduce these feelings. Keep in mind that the negative emotions are about events that occurred in the past and can't be changed. They are meant to change a person's behaviour. If it changes your behaviour, then guilt did its job and you can feel proud that you changed your behaviour.

Regret can be lessened by understanding you made a choice. When you are making a choice, you are really trying to make a decision based on past experience and future outcomes. You can only analyse the information you have on hand at the time. Mothers might regret not spending enough time with their child because of their duties at work and at home. Mothers need to focus on the time spent with their child not what time they did not spend.

### **MYTH 3: DEPRESSION IS A CHEMICAL IMBALANCE.**

Most depression is really being overwhelmed. Most patients I see, who are labelled depressed, are really overwhelmed. They have too much stuff on their agenda, or they react strongly to the stresses they encounter. Medicine does make you feel better, so you feel fewer symptoms, but medicine doesn't take away the underlying cause which is too much stress. My patients see being overwhelmed as fixable without lifelong medicine. Being overwhelmed is scary. Lumping is a common cause of being overwhelmed. This is letting all your stresses merge together. The antidote to lumping is compartmentalisation. Keeping each stress as individual as possible will keep it from being overwhelming.



### **MYTH 4: BOREDOM ISN'T THAT BIG A PROBLEM.**

No, boredom is really bad. Think about it. When criminals have been punished with jail and they break a rule in prison, they are put in solitary confinement. Boredom is the worst punishment we can give to a hardened criminal. But you have to realise there are three kinds of boredom. There is lack of stimulation. There is withdraw from stimulation. There are unenjoyable distractions that keep us from our goal. Each type of boredom needs to be handled differently.

Lack of stimulation is the easiest to fix. We have a world of things to do and see. Different ways to keep us engaged. But we do need a purpose. Finding your purpose in life will keep you from ever getting bored.

Our lives have a lot of stimulation. When the stimulation slows down we have a withdraw and experience boredom. Moving from Mumbai to a small village leads to stimulation withdraw. Withdraw is just like

any addictive drug. The withdraw will stop and your body will adjust the new level of stimulation. Just be patient.

The third form is the feeling that occurs when you want to be a nurse and have to take a chemistry course. You don't like chemistry, but you have to take the class to get to your goal of being a nurse. You don't want to be learning chemistry equations, you want to be helping people heal. But open up your mind and your curiosity. More knowledge can make you a better nurse.

**MYTH 5: SELF-ESTEEM IS ALL ABOUT LOVING YOURSELF.**

Wrong.

There is a lot of group-say in our self-esteem.

Self-esteem is in three parts. Self-worth, self-respect, self-efficacy.

Self-worth comes from your achievements and your self-portrait. But the group decides how many points each trait or achievement is worth. Having a tattoo could be a positive attribute in one group and horribly wrong in a different group.

Self-respect is thinking we are doing things the right way. Smokers used to be told by the group that they were cool and even healthier

because of smoking. Now, smokers are told they are killing themselves and are shunned from indoor activities.

Self-efficacy is about how you think you would perform on a future task. This comes from how you perceive your past experiences and how you envision your future. The group has some say in this too. A girl who wants to become a mathematician has to fight the stereotype that men are better at math.

The group has some say in our self-esteem, but we do have some individual say too. There is a credibility meter in all of our heads.

One end of the spectrum is group and the other end is you. To gain control over your self-esteem you need to push the needle to your own credibility. There, you can listen to the group and take their collective values into consideration but still maintain some independence. Your opinion matters.

In conclusion, you can have less stress by having the knowledge, insight, and understanding to bust these five myths. Then by acquiring proper, efficient tools you can take back control of how you respond to the stresses around you. The positive consequence is you get to spend more time in your 'Happy Place'. ■

