

The Pleasure Principle



What's your idea of pleasure?

A languorous afternoon in bed with your partner? Dancing until the wee hours? Racing around the yard in a wild game of tag with your kids?

Whatever it is that puts a curl in your toes or a glow in your cheeks or simply takes you outside the same-old, same-old for a few minutes—it's a good bet that you don't indulge in it often enough. And it doesn't count if you take your indulgence with an unhealthy dollop of guilt on the side.

Subconsciously, many of us believe that we're not deserving of joy, says Jennifer Fahey-Gigliotti, a spa director at Canyon Ranch Health Resort in the Berkshires in Lenox, Massachusetts. In fact, some of us catch ourselves in the act of relaxing and actually get tense. "We think, 'Oh my gosh, I shouldn't be having such a good time,'" she says, when in reality, "we should be having pleasurable experiences."

When—and why—did we stop seeking out all that makes life delightful? More important, can we actually become gluttons for pleasure while still accomplishing all that our frantic work and home obligations demand?

You bet we can. (We're women!) With a little creativity, we can return to that guilt-free, cartwheeling sense of fun, play, and enjoyment we had as children, and find new ways to pamper ourselves and replenish our energy.

Why We Deny Ourselves Pleasure

How many times have your coworkers asked what you did over the weekend, and you literally couldn't think of a single thing to share?

You know you were busy (that's why you feel so exhausted on Monday mornings). It's just that none of the things you did would actually count as "fun." After all, how interested would they be in 20 loads of laundry and a trip to the hardware store?

But it's not just time that impedes the amount of pleasure we allow into our lives.

Traumatic events in our childhood, such as losing a parent, growing up in a dysfunctional family, or being the "little mother" of the house, may hinder our ability to relax as adults.

Some of us equate letting go with losing control, which makes us uncomfortable. "Some women feel that if they hang a little loose, they'll never regain their composure," says Mindy R. Schiffman, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in New York City. Or we may fear that if we relax, inertia will set in, and we won't ever get moving again.

Or, perish the thought, maybe we're emulating our mothers.

"A woman might have grown up with a long-suffering mom who carried all the family burdens on her shoulders," says Lisa Firestone, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and education and program director for the Glendon Association in Santa Barbara, California. "Allowing herself to have the fun her mother didn't would break that mother-daughter connection. After all, many of us get our identity directly from our mothers."

Whatever our reasons for not enjoying the banquet that is life, we have to start bellying up to the table, because pleasure keeps us healthy, both emotionally and physically. The more we laugh and play with our kids, our partners, and our friends, the less irritable and uptight we are, says Stella Resnick, Ph.D., a psychologist in Los Angeles and author of *The Pleasure Zone: Why We Resist Good Feelings and How to Let Go and Be Happy*. Weekend getaways, cooking classes, gardening, and just hanging out with friends release tension and energize us. "Our bodies become more relaxed. We breathe easier. Our blood

IS HAPPINESS REALLY A WARM PUPPY?

You try not to smile when a 10-pound ball of wagging tail and licking tongue hits you at the door—even though you just stepped out to get the mail. Even research points to happiness as one of the top three benefits of owning a dog. (Companionship and protection are the other two.)

One reason for this could be the play-factor. Adult dog owners spend 44 percent of their time with their pooches playing. Those who are age 65 and older take twice as many walks as people in the same age group who don't have dogs. They're also significantly less dissatisfied with their social lives and physical and emotional health than their dogless peers.

"Pet people describe themselves with more positive adjectives than non-pet owners," says Lynette Hart, director of the Center for Animal Alternatives at the University of California, Davis.

But then, it's easy to feel good about yourself when you're around someone who shows love so easily and who doesn't care about your social status, dress size, or bank account.

All dogs ask for is a fresh bowl of water, a run in the park, and a table scrap once in a while. They don't talk, so conflicts are few. This unconditional support system can be drawn on day or night, when your family or friends may be busy with other things or unreachable, says Hart. And, of course, dogs are a good source of entertainment. (You try not to laugh when they chase their own tails.) That may be why in one study, about one-third of dog owners felt Fido was as important to them as the human members of their families.

Another way that dogs contribute to our happiness: By helping us feel safe and focusing our attention on something other than ourselves, they lessen our anxiety, loneliness, and depression and lower our blood pressure.

flows freely. And we're less susceptible to illness," she says.

Just laughing is good for us. Studies show that laughter helps increase the level of oxygen in our bodies (which maintains healthy brain function),

stimulates the activity of our immune system (which fights off colds and other illnesses), lowers blood pressure, and relieves muscle tension. It may also help alleviate depression, anxiety, stress, hostility, and anger, and spark creativity. What's more, doing what gives us pleasure boosts our self-esteem and helps make us more resilient to life's pressures. The bottom line is: We're just happier women.

Then there's the added bonus of intimacy. Time spent with your partner that doesn't involve the kids, errands, bills, or dishes fosters a closer bond. "There will be more hugging, kissing, smiles of appreciation, and better sex, all of which help us chill out and de-stress," says Susan Heitler, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Denver and author of *The Power of Two: Secrets to a Strong and Loving Marriage*.

Discovering Your Pleasure

So the last time you had fun, the engine in a Volkswagen Beetle was in the rear. These days, "fun" is finding a sale on rump roast or minimizing your pores.

Well, hang on, ladies. We're going to tell you not only how to rediscover your inner child, but how to play so hard with her that you keep smiling even in your dreams.

Make a list. Write down everything you've ever wanted to do but were too afraid, broke, time-starved, or embarrassed to try. Maybe it's riding in the front seat of a roller coaster, your



WOMEN ASK WHY

Why do women hate the Three Stooges?

Have you ever sat down with a man while he watches the Three Stooges? You come to the part where Moe, Larry, and Curly poke each other in the eyes and then fall down, and you don't laugh. You may even yawn and start flipping through a magazine. But the guy you're with rewinds the scene, thinking you missed a subtle nuance of the fall.

"No," you say, "I understood it. I just didn't think it was funny."

To many men, them's fightin' words. The Stooges are the epitome of comedy to the male species. So if you don't laugh, you're considered humorless.

Hey, we've got a funny bone. But like many pieces of our anatomy, it differs from a man's.

Think about it. You never see two women at the grocery store grabbing each other by the nose and going, "Nuk, nuk, nuk." Yet that hazing, fraternity-type humor is the way men greet each other. It's okay for them to say, "Hey, Bob! Nice jacket. You sleep in it all weekend?" instead of just asking how their buddy's weekend went.

We'd never do such a thing. Can you imagine going up to another woman and saying, "Hey, Mary, are you 3 months pregnant or going heavy on the gravy?" You'd lose a friend, and probably a few teeth while you're at it. It's not that we're uptight. It's that we follow an entirely different set of ground rules in the social arena.

Another reason the Stooges aren't as appealing to women is the hierarchy of humor. Moe holds all the power and beats up on Larry and Curly, the dim-witted (relatively speaking),

hands waving over your head. Galloping on horseback along a foam-flecked shoreline. Water-skiing, snowmobiling, or swimming with the fish off a tropical island. Or even just taking a yoga or

powerless Stooges. This is a perfect match for men, since their humor laughs downward. But women's humor laughs upward. We tend to laugh when the person *in power* gets it, such as a pompous boss, not the fat kid who stutters. We don't laugh at things people can't change.

Some people believe that the Three Stooges are too violent for women's tastes. But the eye-poking and pan-slammings really aren't the problem. After all, most women loved it when Thelma and Louise blew up the vulgar trucker's rig. The Three Stooges is an attention-deficit-disorder kind of entertainment. You don't have to pay attention, remember the plot, or even listen carefully. Men can crunch on chips and flip back to the football game while watching the Three Stooges and never miss a thing. Women have a slightly more sophisticated sense of the absurd than someone spitting in their soup or falling down. And we'd like a plot with our movie.

The disparity between funny bones doesn't stop there. Even the ways we share humor are different. When a woman wants to tell you something funny, she tells a story. Lines such as "Oh my God, you mean that happened to you, too?" are heard frequently in our conversations. We want to know we're not crazy. Men's sense of humor, however, is often competitive, with each man trying to top the other's jokes.

So women definitely have a sense of humor. In fact, we're riotously appreciative of the absurd. If we weren't, we wouldn't have put up with men for so many years.

Expert consulted

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White . . . But I Drifted

meditation class to learn whether you have the ability to sit still for 20 minutes. "Whatever it is, it will require you to let down your defenses and take the plunge," says Dr. Firestone.

The point is, the list gives you a starting place. Maybe roller coasters make you nauseated. So how about hitting an amusement park? You live in Kansas, thousands of miles from any beach. But there are still horses around. Diving makes your ears hurt. So how about snorkeling? The important thing is to identify some key areas in your life that are different from the everyday and that you feel would bring you pleasure.

Revisit your childhood. What did you enjoy doing most when you were a young girl? If you loved to tap-dance, play the piano, dunk a basketball, or even visit the zoo, chances are you'll find all of these activities just as pleasurable now as an adult, says Dr. Heitler.

Scan the papers. Open any newspaper, and you'll find loads of unique and interesting things to do, from plays and lectures to art fairs and dance classes. Start a "pleasure scrapbook" of ideas and commit to trying one each month.

Visit a bookstore. Pay attention to what captures your attention. If you spend most of your time browsing through the gardening section, plan to attend a floral exhibit or start your own garden. If you're attracted to books on exercise, join a walking, jogging, or cycling club. Perusing the spirituality section? Start your own prayer group. Picking up coffee-table books on photography? Take a class at a local college or university.

Fulfill your fantasy. Assume that money is no object, your boss gave you an extra 2 weeks'

GOSSIP CAN BE GOOD FOR YOU

Shooting the breeze. Chatting with the girls. Tapping the grapevine. Gossip by any other name is still gossip. Although it's best known for ruining friendships and destroying reputations, gossip can also help us explore our values, expose maltreatment, and laugh away anger, all the while strengthening friendships.

We like to believe that when we share kind words about a friend, we're not gossiping. But anytime our conversation takes a detour from its main focus and we start talking (naughty or nice) about someone who isn't present, we're gossiping, says Anne Skleder, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Alvernia College in Reading, Pennsylvania.

For example, during a family dinner you and your sister-in-law chatter about the beautiful floral centerpiece. That's not gossip. But if you talk about how sweet it was of your brother's new girlfriend to bring it, that's gossip.

Often, when we gossip, we reveal our belief system, leaving ourselves wide open to criticism. So if you whisper to a coworker that you think it's shameless of the secretary to take an hour-and-a-half lunch without making up the time, you risk her thinking you're a drill sergeant. If she accepts what you say and doesn't criticize you, however, you're more likely to share even deeper thoughts next time, which builds intimacy and trust.

Although women who gossip excessively aren't widely liked—probably because they break trust—what's surprising is that those who *don't* dish aren't trusted (or liked) either. At least, that's what Dr. Skleder found when she studied women in a sorority house. In fact, the women who didn't gossip at all were nearly as disliked as those who gossiped too much.

Another gossiping tidbit: Those who gossiped the most were the most gossiped about.

Gossip's side effects can be good. Gossip can segue to conversations about our own values that we wouldn't otherwise discuss, or it can lead to discoveries about others. For instance, through gossip, Dr. Skleder and her neighbors learned that no one had seen an elderly neighbor for days. It turned out that the neighbor was ill and unable to leave her house. Thanks to gossip, the neighborhood women began helping her.

vacation, and your mom will care for the kids. What would you do? The idea here is not to censor yourself. So whether it's an Alaskan cruise, a full-body massage, or hiking the Himalayas, write it down.

Then break your fantasy down into steps. For the cruise, for instance, the first step might be to talk to a travel agent and collect some catalogs. It may take you 3 years to save for it, but in the meantime, you can read books about Alaska, surf the Internet for cruise bargains, and begin putting together your cruise wardrobe. And every time you bag your lunch, walk instead of take a taxi, or watch network television because you've nixed the cable, you'll be clear about what you're saving for. "The point is to turn your fantasy into a reality," explains Dr. Resnick.

Question. Ask yourself, "What's the last thing my friends and family would ever expect me to do?" Then do it.

The Time Factor

So now you know what fun looks like to you. It's a morning hike, followed by a gourmet picnic overlooking a scenic vista, just you and your journal. Next, you have to figure out how to shoehorn it into your schedule without simply adding another item to your overflowing to-do list; therein lies only more stress.

"Those of us who claim 'I don't have time' say that out of habit," says Dr. Resnick. We're raised to believe

we're the sole caregivers in our families, despite having careers. "So we're constantly giving and never taking for ourselves," she says. By the time we've given it all, it's 10:00 P.M.

It's a vicious circle that, if not broken, keeps us irritable, anxious, short-tempered, and tense: all of the things this inner journey is designed to prevent. So forget "can't." If you have time to man the bake sale table at the school carnival, you have time for that hike. Experts believe the following strategies may help.

Delegate. If you're the one making dinner, cleaning the kitchen, folding the laundry, vacuuming the hallway, reading the bedtime stories to the kids, and ironing his shirts, you're doing too much. The solution? Divide the after-work chores with your partner. Appoint him (or your teenager) chef for dinner 2 nights a week. Take turns putting the kids to bed. Hire someone to clean your house. Presto! You've stolen time for that after-work class or walk. (Your man or kids won't help? Tell them to order takeout, ignore the dust balls, and hit the road anyway.)

Disappear. Pick one weekend a month on which you vow not to set foot in a grocery store, dry cleaner, Wal-Mart, or shopping mall. Then use those 2 delicious days to explore what gives you pleasure and to have some guilt-free fun.

Prioritize. Make a pie chart of your day, labeling the pieces according to the tasks: commuting, work, cooking, cleaning, homework,



ALL IN THE GENES?

Why are men content with three pairs of shoes total while women are unwilling to settle for just three in one color?

It's political.

In the early 18th century, men wore heels just as high as women's. In fact, from their heads down to their toes, men were just as stylish as their female counterparts, sporting pink silk suits, blue velvet vests trimmed with lace and jeweled buttons, and shoes with red high heels.

But that all changed as capitalism and democracy rose. An aristocratic sense of fashion was replaced by bourgeois practicality. Work became a priority, and clothing reflected that new attitude by becoming more uniform, sober, and reliable.

Since women were excluded both economically and politically from the capitalist and democratic environment, their attitudes toward clothing and fashion evolved from the gaudy to the conservative more slowly. So as working clothes grew more staid, fashion naturally became linked with femininity.

Shoes magnify that difference. Although these days women have also adopted the somber workforce uniform of the business suit, shoes are one of the few areas in which we can still play and be expressive with fashion. Think about it: Different pairs of shoes can make the same old business suit appear uptown, funky downtown, girly, or ultrachic.

Plus, there's the shopping factor. Shopping exists on a continuum of pleasure. Footwear tops the joy-giving list because you're never too old or too heavy for beautiful shoes.

You don't even have to wear them to have them look great. Unlike most clothes, which just lie there when you take them off, shoes retain their shape. They're like pieces of sculpture. That's why some women buy shoes they know they'll never wear. For instance, I buy vintage shoes. They may not fit, but they're beautiful. I set them on my desk or shelves like other pieces of fine art.

Expert consulted

Valerie Steele

Author of *Shoes: A Lexicon of Style*

relaxing and fun, making love, and sleeping. Which is the biggest slice? (If it's making love or sleeping, then you don't need to read any further.) Now you can clearly see what's out of balance.

Next, make another list of ways in which you can equal out some of those pieces. Is your commute too long? Maybe you can telecommute part-time, or maybe you need a different, closer-to-home job. Does your work take up half the pie? Commit to leaving at 5:00 P.M. for 1 week, without bringing any work home. Do you find yourself chauffeuring the kids more than you talk to your husband? Limit them to one activity each and explain that Mom is entitled to a little fun and games, too.

Schedule. Pleasure comes in small doses, too. So set aside 30 minutes to 1 hour each day for something enjoyable, and don't let anything take its place. Some wild ideas to get you started: Paint your toenails bright green (no one will see them if it's winter). Shoot some hoops out on the driveway. Eavesdrop in an Internet chat room for exotic dancers. Blast the Rolling Stones on the stereo and dance around the house.

Pleasure for Two

There's one area of pleasure that definitely takes two: sex. Unfortunately, this is another area of our lives from which exhaustion, tension, stress, and boredom may have driven out all the fun. It's time to recapture the passion of your dating days.



WOMAN TO WOMAN

She Found Her Best Friend When She Began Playing Outdoors

When the careers and hobbies of Amy Morgan, 47, of Mendham, New Jersey, and her husband separated, so did their relationship. But rock climbing helped her rediscover her best friend. Here is her story.

You know that couple you see at restaurants, the one you can tell has been together forever? They have a 2-hour dinner and never say one word to each other. I've always feared that. Much to my horror, after 18 years, my husband and I were becoming that couple.

When we first met in April 1980, we immediately hit it off. Having been through a divorce, I knew what a bad relationship was like, and this wasn't it. We became best friends and loved doing everything together. Our relationship naturally segued into marriage 6 months later.

It was fun right from the beginning. We loved exploring and trying new things together, especially if it involved making things from scratch. We even went so far as to make homemade liverwurst!

But that changed. We started focusing more on our careers, which were very different (I'm a copy editor and he's a computer programmer). Our hobbies went in different directions: He hiked and went mountain biking, I sewed. We didn't even maintain our home together anymore because we started renting. No more painting walls or gardening shoulder-to-shoulder.

It's well worth your time, too. "Couples with wonderful sex lives are less anxious and less depressed and have greater self-esteem than those whose sex lives are dull or sporadic," says Dr. Resnick.

Enjoyable sex can also make you more playful, less self-conscious, more spontaneous, and, of course, a better lover. It releases "feel-good" endorphins that bust stress, lift our spirits, and

the living room. Rent a cheap hotel room for a quickie, or check out the back seat of the minivan (you'll never view it as the mommy-mobile again).

Share your fantasies. And then find a way to make them come true.

Make a date. Not for dinner and a movie, but for sex. Put it on your calendar in a code word only the two of you know. Don't roll your eyes. After all, you schedule your dentist appointments and haircuts, don't you?

Use e-mail. Open a free account on an Internet site such as Yahoo.com and send each other mushy messages throughout the day.

Abstain. This might seem to be a silly way to get more lovemaking into your life, but some sex therapists suggest that couples with problems first consciously abstain from sex for a week. The catch is that each night of that week, they spend time together just touching each other. Remember necking in high school when you were already 5 minutes past your curfew? Wouldn't you like to have those I-just-can't-help-myself feelings again?

Create a love nest. If you last bought sheets when Ronald Reagan was president, you're due for a major

white sale. Splurge on satin or high-quality cotton. But don't stop there. Add lots of pillows for positioning, jettison the work-related reading for a table full of erotica and candles, and put a couple of bowls of sandalwood potpourri around the room. And don't forget to banish the TV to the basement.

Kiss him. Really kiss him. In the kitchen. In front of the kids. In front of friends. In the

With nothing in common, we began leading parallel lives, coexisting with one another. It seemed as though I was looking at him through an impenetrable cloud. I was losing my best friend, and it scared me.

We have always believed that marriage takes a lot of work, time, energy, and thought to keep it healthy and strong. And that it is a commitment. We never entered into it with an exit strategy. But the prospect of staying together and having completely separate lives was a living hell I couldn't bear. You can't just watch a marriage of 18 years drift apart.

So after 2 years of ever-growing distance, in the summer of 1998, we finally did something about it.

We knew we needed to do things together. So I learned rock climbing and inline skating (new interests of his) and he learned Spanish. (I knew a little but wanted to learn more.)

Those changes woke us up and made us realize we were both too stuffy and needed to get a little silly. We began goofing around more, quoting silly lines from *The Princess Bride* and getting into pillow fights.

Today, we play by exploring, learning new things. Plans are under way to build a climbing wall of our own, and we bought a tandem bike—the only way I can keep up with him on the trails. We want to know what's around the next bend. It's a childlike curiosity that keeps us feeling young. It even makes others think we are younger than our age.

And it worked. In 2000, we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary exploring Puerto Rico.

produce feelings of well-being (we know this as the afterglow). Plus, it's just a whole lot of fun. To recapture the passion, experts suggest the following ideas.

Change the location. It's amazing how making love in different surroundings can rev up a relationship. Got a private backyard? How about under the stars on a summer night when there's a full moon. Are your kids away on a sleepover? Try



INNER-SPACE EXPLORERS

Who was Erik Erikson?

This ego psychoanalyst was born Erik Homberger in Germany in 1902, but he changed his last name to Erikson after he moved to the United States in 1933. The illegitimate child of a Danish father he never knew, the blond, blue-eyed Jew suffered an identity crisis, a term he later coined and a subject to which he devoted his research.

Once Anna Freud's patient, Erikson called himself an ego psychoanalyst because he based his thinking on Sigmund Freud's theory that personality consists of an id, an ego, and a superego. He emphasized the ego, which is the conscious aspect of our personality.

Until he developed his theory of psychosocial development, psychologists believed that intellectual and emotional development stopped at the age of 12. But Erikson noticed that identity crises happen throughout our lives and that every time we have to deal with them, we grow as a person.

He listed the crises we face in eight stages of development: trust versus mistrust at age 1; independence versus doubt at age 2; initiative versus guilt from ages 3 to 5; competence versus inferiority from age 6 through puberty; identity versus confusion in adolescence; intimacy versus isolation in early adulthood; familial love and care versus loneliness in middle age; and wisdom versus despair with life in old age. The outcomes from these identity crises ultimately shape our personalities.

Erikson's theory doesn't have much empirical support because it can't be tested in the laboratory. Other psychologists also argue that life development isn't so predictable. But that hasn't stopped other psychologists from taking Erikson's lead and developing stage theories of their own.

middle of the evening news. We're not talking a peck on the cheek here, either.

Play together. No, not in bed. Get him involved in some of the fun activities you've

dreamed up. Have an adventure together. (Skydiving can do amazing things for your sex life, assuming you're still alive.) Take a cooking class together and then sample the results (preferably with the lights out and some towels spread on the bed).

Call in sick together. The kids are in school, the dog is outside, and—finally—it's just the two of you alone in the house. You take it from there.

A Pleasure Prescription

When it's time for some pleasure on your own, you might want to try these suggestions.

A spa. One of the fastest-growing segments in the beauty industry is the day spa, with facials, massages, and other forms of pampering becoming a regular part of the routines of many beauty salons.

A massage. Yield to your need to be kneaded. It feels amazing. And although you may not care while in the midst of having your feet rubbed, research suggests that massage strengthens our immunity by helping our bodies produce more disease-fighting white blood cells, lower blood pressure, reduce stress hormone levels, and improve our mood.

An exercise class. If the very thought of step aerobics makes you groan, consider that there are tons of activities you've yet to try, such as Spinning, rock climbing, fencing, freestyle dance,

ballet, and the minitrampoline. You'll get a great cardiovascular workout in an atmosphere that allows you to be playful and uninhibited. An added bonus: Studies show that 30 minutes of aerobic activity 3 days a week may be just as effective as medication for relieving symptoms of depression. Moreover, there's evidence that regular exercise slows our bodies' responses to the stress that makes us cranky and anxious.

Aromatherapy. Sweeten the atmosphere in your home and office with fresh flowers, gorgeous green plants, potpourri, and aromatherapy sprays, candles, or oils. But don't just

indulge your nose. Indulge your other senses, too. By continuously stimulating your five senses, you allow yourself to experience pleasure in entirely new ways. For example, treat your ears to lush Beethoven symphonies or the lavish waltzes of Johann Strauss. Pamper your eyes with a beautiful poster, calendar, or painting. Treat your tongue to the bite of cayenne pepper or the sweetness of ridiculously expensive, out-of-season fruit. Touch the soft nape of a child's neck, your dog's silky coat, or your friend's or partner's hand.

Feel. Breathe. Be here now.