

Supplement 3: The need for instant gratification as a barrier to wellbeing

This supplement draws from the following sources:

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Instant gratification: A barrier to wellbeing

The principle of instant gratification may be a consideration when aiming to improve any aspect of wellbeing. Instant gratification refers to the inability to resist the temptation for an immediate reward and wait for a later reward. For example, the immediate pleasure of watching TV can be more tempting than the long-term benefits of exercising. This tendency to favour short-term rewards, or instant gratification, over long-term gains, or delayed gratification, can make it challenging to adopt and maintain well-being behaviors.

For example:

- *Environmental wellbeing*: The immediate ease of not decluttering or organizing your space can be more tempting than the long-term benefits of a serene and orderly environment.
- *Social*: Choosing to stay in your comfort zone rather than reaching out to build meaningful relationships can prevent the development of a supportive social network.
- *Financial*: The temptation to spend money on non-essential items can overshadow the long-term benefits of saving and financial security.
- *Vocational*: Avoiding the effort to pursue fulfilling work or improve skills can be more appealing than the long-term satisfaction and growth from career development.
- *Emotional*: Opting for immediate emotional relief, such as venting anger, instead of practicing emotional regulation can hinder long-term emotional resilience.
- *Intellectual*: The allure of passive entertainment can be more enticing than engaging in activities that stimulate intellectual growth and creativity.
- *Spiritual*: Immediate distractions can prevent the pursuit of practices that provide a deeper sense of purpose and inner peace.
- *Physical*: The immediate comfort of staying sedentary can be more appealing than the long-term benefits of regular exercise and a healthy lifestyle.¹
- *Behavioural*: Sticking to familiar habits, even if they are unhealthy, can be easier than adopting new, healthier routines.

¹ “This is particularly problematic in higher-income countries, which have twice the levels of inactivity compared with lower-income ones, and where many people aren’t sufficiently active to stay healthy in the long term.” (Robson 2024)

Strategies for change

A. Motivation and mindset

1. Understand and leverage motivation types: Differentiate between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.² Aim to cultivate intrinsic motivation, which stems from finding joy in the activity itself. For example, exercising because it makes you feel good rather than solely to lose weight. Intrinsic motivation is more sustainable for long-term behaviour change. (*Int, Emo*)

2. Combine strengths with a growth mindset: Focus on your strengths to achieve mastery, as developing areas where you naturally excel can lead to significant gains. At the same time, adopt a growth mindset, believing that your abilities and habits can improve with time and effort.³ This dual approach allows you to capitalize on your strengths while staying resilient and open to learning from setbacks. Be mindful of the "too much of a good thing" effect, where overused strengths can become toxic; for example, conscientiousness can turn into perfectionism, and confidence can become arrogance. For weaknesses, develop compensatory techniques to manage them effectively without draining your energy. This balanced strategy fosters confidence and long-term success. (*Int, Voc*)

3. Visualize future benefits (productively): Focus on realistic visualizations that include the steps, challenges, and actions needed to achieve your goals. This process-oriented approach helps prepare you mentally for the journey and keeps you motivated. Avoid unproductive fantasizing that skips the effort and creates a false sense of achievement. (*Int, Emo*)

4. Embrace defensive pessimism: Prepare for potential setbacks by considering worst-case scenarios. This approach helps you develop strategies to overcome obstacles and stay motivated. For instance, think about how you will handle days when you don't feel like exercising. (*Int, Emo*)

5. Believe in unlimited willpower: Adopt the belief that willpower is an unlimited resource. Research shows that individuals who see willpower as boundless perform better in self-control tasks and make healthier choices. Cultivating this mindset can enhance your ability to stick to your goals. (*Int, Emo*)

6. Manage expectations and accept change: Recognize that not all outcomes can be controlled and that setbacks are part of life. Instead of lamenting disappointments, focus on what you can learn and how you can improve. Embrace the journey and process of growth rather than fixating solely on the end goal. (*Spi, Emo*)

7. Load good choices with emotion: Attach positive emotions to the actions you want to take. This makes them more compelling and motivating. For example, if exercising makes you feel happy and energized, focus on these emotions to reinforce the habit. (*Emo*)

B. Goal setting and planning

1. Create a SMART plan: Set goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART). Break down larger objectives into smaller, manageable tasks. For example, if you want to run a marathon, start with shorter runs and gradually increase your distance. (*Int, Emo*)

² *Extrinsic motivation* is driven by external rewards or pressures. Individuals engage in a behaviour to earn rewards or avoid punishments. For example, a person might work hard to receive a pay rise, good grades, or praise from others. *Intrinsic motivation* comes from within an individual. It is driven by internal rewards and personal satisfaction. People engage in a behaviour because they find it inherently enjoyable, fulfilling, or interesting. For example, someone might play a musical instrument because they love the process of making music.

³ "People with 'fixed' mindsets tend to interpret any failure as a sign that they don't have it in them to succeed." (Robson 2024)

2. Tailor motivation to your style: Identify what motivates you personally and tailor your strategies accordingly. Whether it's setting up accountability, creating urgency with deadlines, or breaking tasks into smaller goals, find what works best for you. If you are driven by large, ambitious goals, set a significant target that incorporates your true objectives. For example, if you aim to lose weight but find daily exercise tedious, sign up for a challenging event like a marathon to keep you motivated. *(Int, Emo)*

3. Utilize flow mindset techniques: Find your "why" to deeply connect with your goals. Link new habits to existing ones and make the process as seamless as possible. For instance, if you want to meditate daily, you could do it right after brushing your teeth. *(Spi, Emo)*

4. Do something else (behaviour spillover): Engage in a positive activity that indirectly supports another goal. For example, joining an exercise class can lead to healthier eating habits. The principle of behaviour spillover suggests that positive behaviours in one area can influence and encourage positive changes in another. However, be cautious. Sometimes engaging in a positive behaviour, like exercising or choosing a healthy snack, can create a false sense of entitlement to indulge in less healthy habits. *(Phy, Emo)*

C. Environment and habits

1. Use nudges to overcome inertia: Implement small changes in your environment to nudge yourself towards the desired behaviour. For instance, placing your workout clothes next to your bed can make it easier to exercise in the morning. Simplifying the process reduces the mental barrier to starting a new habit. *(Emo)*

2. Adjust your environment: Modify your surroundings to support your goals. Remove temptations and make healthier options more accessible. For example, keep healthy snacks within reach and avoid stocking junk food. *(Env)*

3. Declutter your environment: Reducing clutter in your home and workspace can significantly enhance productivity and reduce stress. Research indicates that people with less clutter are more likely to be productive and happy. However, while a clean and organized space can be beneficial, it's essential to find a balance that works for you. For some, a certain amount of clutter may actually stimulate their attention system. If you find clutter mentally exhausting and distracting, focus on creating a more organized environment to help maintain your focus and energy for other goals. *(Int, Emo)*

D. Accountability and support

1. Maintain accountability: Establish accountability structures to stay on track. This could involve using tracking apps, joining groups with similar goals, or finding an accountability partner. Sharing your progress with others can provide encouragement and a sense of responsibility. *(Soc, Voc)*

2. Regular self-monitoring: Track your progress and behaviours regularly. Keeping a journal or using apps to log your activities can help you stay aware and make necessary adjustments. *(Int, Emo)*

3. Seek support from loved ones: Share your goals with friends and family and ask for their specific support. This can help you avoid resentment and ensure you stay on track. Let them know what you are trying to achieve and how they can assist you in reaching your objectives, whether it's through encouragement, accountability, or providing practical help. *(Soc, Emo)*

E. Stress management and coping

1. Develop coping mechanisms for stress: Manage stress effectively to maintain self-control and focus. Practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or mindfulness to keep stress levels in check. *(Emo, Phy)*

2. Embrace habit formation: Understand that developing new habits takes time and repetition. Use the various strategies set out in this supplement to reinforce the new behavior, and be patient with yourself during the process. (*Beh, Emo*)

Motivational styles

Identifying your motivational style involves reflecting on your personal experiences, preferences, and responses to different situations. Here are some steps to help you identify your motivational style:

- 1. Reflect on past successes:** Think about times when you successfully achieved a goal or completed a task. What motivated you during those times? Were you driven by internal satisfaction, external rewards, deadlines, or support from others?
- 2. Analyse your goals:** Consider the types of goals you set for yourself. Do you prefer big, audacious goals, or do you thrive with smaller, incremental objectives? Understanding your goal-setting preferences can provide insight into your motivational style.
- 3. Observe your reactions:** Pay attention to how you react in different situations. Do you feel energized by competition, or do you prefer collaborative environments? Are you more productive with a structured schedule, or do you excel with flexibility and autonomy?
- 4. Identify your rewards:** Determine what types of rewards motivate you. Are you driven by tangible rewards like money or prizes, or do you find fulfillment in intangible rewards such as personal growth, recognition, or a sense of accomplishment?
- 5. Seek feedback:** Ask friends, family, or colleagues for their observations about what motivates you. Sometimes others can provide valuable insights that you may not have noticed about yourself.
- 6. Use self-assessment tools:** There are various self-assessment tools and questionnaires available online that can help you identify your motivational style. These tools often ask questions about your preferences, behaviors, and attitudes toward goals and challenges.
- 7. Experiment and adapt:** Try different strategies and approaches to see what works best for you. Pay attention to your energy levels, productivity, and satisfaction with different methods. Be open to adjusting your strategies based on what you learn about yourself.

Some styles

- 1. Achievement-oriented:** Driven by a desire to accomplish goals and attain excellence. This style is characterized by setting high standards and working diligently to meet them.
- 2. Affiliation-oriented:** Motivated by a need for social connections and relationships. Individuals with this style thrive on teamwork, collaboration, and social interactions.
- 3. Intrinsic:** Finds motivation from within, driven by personal satisfaction, curiosity, and enjoyment of the activity itself. This style is sustainable and promotes long-term engagement.
- 4. Extrinsic:** Motivated by external rewards such as money, recognition, or approval from others. This style can be effective for short-term goals but may not sustain long-term commitment.
- 5. Goal-oriented:** Focuses on setting and achieving specific objectives. This style involves breaking down goals into manageable tasks and maintaining a clear vision of the desired outcome.
- 6. Growth mindset:** Believes that abilities and intelligence can develop with time and effort. Embraces challenges and views failures as opportunities for learning and improvement.
- 7. Avoidance-oriented:** Motivated by a desire to avoid negative outcomes or consequences. This style involves taking action to prevent failure, discomfort, or negative feedback.
- 8. Power-oriented:** Driven by a desire for control, influence, and impact. Individuals with this style seek leadership roles and strive to make a significant difference.
- 9. Purpose-driven:** Finds motivation from a sense of purpose and meaning. This style involves aligning actions with personal values and beliefs, often leading to a deep sense of fulfillment.

By understanding your motivational style, you can tailor your goals, strategies, and environments to better align with what drives you, ultimately leading to greater satisfaction and success in your endeavours.