

THE SMILE DIET

How to be happier and healthier starting right now

How many times have you smiled today? Not just a polite, “how ya doin’?” smile but a smile that involved an open mouth and crinkled eyes. If your answer is in the single digits, you could stand to read this article. Research shows that smiling, laughter, optimism and enthusiasm not only make you feel happier, they also boost self-esteem, make losing weight easier, enhance relationships, help heal disease and keep you well. To help you get the hang of it, *OK!* talked with Mary Marcdante, author of *Living With Enthusiasm* and creator of the Smile Diet, and found out her top seven strategies for bringing smiles into your life. Try to do one of them each day of the week. “Doing even one small positive thing every day can impact your attitude, immune system and entire well-being,” says Marcdante.

Strike a 16-Second Smile

“We all feel better when we smile,” says Marcdante. “A smile is the first stage of laughter, and physiologically and emotionally, a smile tells our brains that we are safe and we can relax.” A smile, no matter how long you hold it, is great. But, says Marcdante, there is evidence that it takes 16 seconds for your brain to memorize the feel-good message from the smile and send it to the rest of your body. “Hold your smile, even if it’s fake when you



Oprah Winfrey shares her enthusiasm. “She has a desire to help others and build community,” says Marcdante.



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Rachel Bilson
looks like she
knows how to
enjoy herself.



Julia Roberts' famous smile and bright eyes radiate energy, charisma and power from within, says Marcdante.

start. Make eye contact with other people, and you'll often discover your genuine smile," she says. "The longer you hold it, the longer the endorphins are in your body."

Take a Laughter Break

"This takes the 16-second smile to the next level," says Marcdante. Force yourself to laugh for 30 seconds any way you can. "This gets the endorphins going," she says. "Try to involve a few other people too. You may feel stupid, but often fake laughter leads to real belly laughter and positive emotion." Think of it as exercising your laughter muscle — it gets better and stronger the more you use it.

Feel the Ohhh Effect

This one can be interpreted in a few ways. Yes, it can mean the big O — the one we experience in the bedroom. Or it can mean the sound you make when you see a puppy or a gorgeous sunset. "Ohhh" is what we say when we are surprised by something so amazing that it takes our breath away," says Marcdante. "And if you haven't had an 'ohhh' moment by noon, you need to go looking for it." Step back, look around and marvel at something. It could be as simple as the phone you're using. Think about how great it is that we have this technology that can connect us to people around the world and say 'Ohhh.' It will brighten your mood.

Tally Up Your Factor of Five

"This means making sure you have at least five positive people in your life who would be there for you in the middle of the night if you needed them," explains Marcdante. Why do we need these people? "Many studies indicate that being part of a commu-

nity is a major factor in how long people survive." If you don't have five friends or loved ones you can call on, spend the next year cultivating these people in your life.

Do It Just for Now

Say you were passed over for a promotion and you're upset. Choose to feel better — just for now. "Negative emotions keep us stuck if we focus on them too long," says Marcdante. "The idea is to acknowledge the negative feeling quickly, and then shift, with a smile, to a positive feeling and image." During this process, call upon aspects of your job that you do like. This can help you enjoy what's good about what you've got right now.

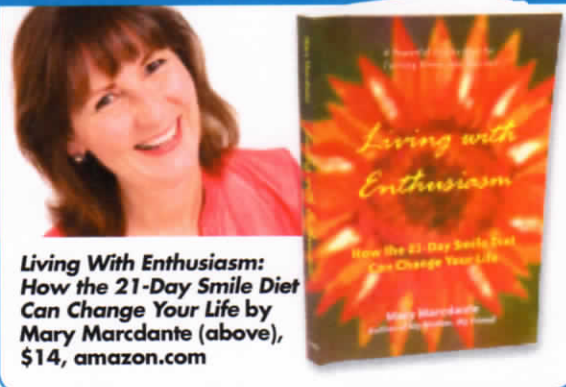
Act As If

"This is the fake-it-til-you-make-it concept," says Marcdante. If what you want is to live like Madonna, for instance, go ahead and act as if you have her life. While you can't move into her multimillion dollar home in England, you can sing and dance to her music and pretend it's yours. The point here is not to become delusional, but instead to act out what you want until you start to feel better. Going through the motions can trigger real positive feelings.

Say the Thank You Mantra

"This is one of the most powerful strategies because it combines a 16-second smile with being grateful for the good in your life," says Marcdante. The moment you wake up in the morning, smile for 16 seconds. Then try to hold it for a minute or two more while saying "thank you." Think about the things you appreciate — your family, your health, the movie you saw last night — and let these positive thoughts start your day. "Energy flows where attention goes. So focus on what makes you grateful and happy." You'll have a much better outlook on the day, and your attitude will likely improve someone else's outlook too. **OK!**

FOR MORE TIPS...



Living With Enthusiasm: How the 21-Day Smile Diet Can Change Your Life by Mary Marcdante (above), \$14, amazon.com

ASK RACHEL

Our health director answers your top questions



DEAR RACHEL

Should I see my doctor for a check-up every year?

A. "If you're a healthy woman between 20 and 40 years old, there is no real reason you have to see your family physician or internist every year, unless your doctor says otherwise," says Dr. Zach Rosen, medical director of the Montefiore Family Health Center in NYC. "It's a myth that a check-up, particularly during this period of life, helps forestall serious disease in otherwise healthy women with no family history of chronic disease." But (and this is an important caveat) if you are overweight, smoke or have a personal or family history of a chronic health condition such as asthma, diabetes, hypertension or cancer, check with your doctor to find out how often you need an exam. If your family doc doesn't need to see you annually, adds Dr. Rosen, you should at least get your blood pressure checked every two years to keep tabs on your risk for cardiovascular disease. Also remember: You must see your ob-gyn for a yearly pelvic and breast exam, and once you hit 40, you'll need an annual mammogram too.

DEAR RACHEL

I know dark cola stains teeth, but will clear cola cause stains?

A. While there's no research comparing dark cola and clear cola and their respective teeth-staining abilities, common sense says clear cola is going to cause less staining than dark, says Dr. Charles H. Perle, a spokesperson for the Academy of General Dentistry. There is research, though, showing that the acid in clear cola can erode tooth enamel, even if it's diet and doesn't contain sugar. So while you may not be able to see a stain with clear cola, damage is still being done. The solution? "When you drink cola, use a straw to keep it off your teeth," says Dr. Perle. If you don't have a straw, brush your teeth within a half hour of drinking the beverage, or at least rinse your mouth out with water.

IF YOU HAVE A HEALTH OR FITNESS QUESTION, email askrachel@ok-magazine.com OR WRITE TO: ASK RACHEL, OK! MAGAZINE, 475 5TH AVE., NEW YORK, NY 10017

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