

The background features a vibrant floral arrangement in the top-left corner with orange, blue, and purple flowers. The rest of the page is filled with a bokeh effect of pink and purple circles and a pattern of small, multi-colored stars. A faint grid pattern is visible in the background.

10 Fuel-Injected Activities to Feel Brand New and Release Your Inner Child

*Living Playfully
with Kerry Hargraves*

This clever little e-book is designed to protect you from ever feeling the weight of the world on your shoulders.

This is a golden opportunity to:

1. Find the playful in even the most mundane tasks.
2. Unleash the laughter inside and out at any given moment.
3. Banish the boredom and find the bodacious in life and relationships. And much more.
4. Learn to lose control with confidence

It doubles as a great fire starter if you print your e-books!



1 Go Outside and Get Barefoot

When was the last time you walked around outside in your bare feet? I don't mean the last time you were at the beach. No one likes sand in their shoes so barefoot is natural. I mean barefoot outside in your yard, or at the park, or even in the grass landscaping around a local public building. (The best grass in my neighborhood is along the sidewalk at Kaiser Hospital and yes, I take off my shoes and walk around there whenever I can.)

As soon as you finish reading this, go outside and find some grass to stand in. Dirt is fine. No dirt or grass? This will work on concrete too (but not asphalt.) Take off your shoes and stand barefoot. Walk around a little. Really feel the ground beneath your feet. Pay attention to the sensations, the textures, the temperatures.

While you're out there take some deep breaths. Look around you. Listen to the sounds. Notice the smells. Feel the air on your face and skin. Notice your connection to the earth and your surroundings. Relax and let yourself just "be".

Direct contact with the surface of the earth gives your body a charge of natural energy. (Check out "earthing" if you need more convincing.)

Now you can get back to work, refreshed and renewed, with a boost of energy and creativity.

Want a real treat. Get barefoot in some mud. Let it squish up between your toes. Enjoy the "shlurp" as you lift your feet. So sensual, so primal, so much fun. More about mud later.



2 Sing

It's good for you. Yes, even if you can't carry a tune, are tone deaf, or can't remember any of the words. (Hey, I make up my own or just fake it.) Sing out loud, emphasis on LOUD. If you're too shy, or too kind, to sing in public or even at home if anyone else is around, sing in the car. I bet there's a lot of time when you're in the car all by yourself. Crank up the tunes and let 'er rip. Turn the volume up high enough and you'll sound great. (It works for me.) The guy in the car next to you might look at you funny but at least you're not picking your nose.

Anyway, it's not how it looks (or in this case how it sounds) it's how it feels. Singing makes you feel great. It raises your vibration, increases your oxygen intake, exercises your lungs, tones your facial muscles, increases mental alertness (all that

oxygen), opens up the sinuses, improves your posture because it makes you sit or stand a little straighter and gives you a little dose of endorphins.

Whoa! All that from making an unholy racket in the car? Yes!

You get all of that even as a bad singer (that's me.) If you happen to be any good at it, or just don't care that you aren't, there are even more benefits to be had. Singing in community, even karaoke, helps you meet more people, promotes bonding and encourages a sense of community.

Other benefits include strengthening concentration and memory (boy can I use that!). It provides an opportunity for fun and laughter (back to karaoke and my singing) as well as adding richness and quality to your voice.

In short, singing is good for you both physically and emotionally plus it's FUN!



3 Laugh

Go ahead, laugh! Throw back your head and let loose with a great big belly laugh! Even a fake laugh, done with enough vigor and enthusiasm will do you good. Chance are it will turn into a real laugh somewhere along the line so it won't be fake for long..

Laughter is good for us in many ways; physically, mentally and socially.

You change physiologically when you laugh. You stretch muscles throughout your face and body, your pulse and blood pressure go up, and you breathe faster, sending more oxygen to your tissues. It's like a mild work out. Combining laughter and movement, like waving your arms, is a great way to boost your heart rate. It

burns calories too. (No, it won't replace your daily walk or that dreaded 20 minutes on the treadmill, but every bit helps, right?)

Other ways that laughter is good for you:

- You can't feel anxious, angry, or sad when you're laughing
- It reduces stress and increases energy, enabling you to stay focused and accomplish more.
- Humor shifts perspective, allowing you to see situations in a more realistic, less threatening light. A humorous perspective creates psychological distance, which can help you avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.

- Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.
- It triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.
- Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.
- Humor gets you out of your head and away from your troubles, helping you be more spontaneous
- Laughter helps you forget judgments, criticisms, and doubts.
- It releases inhibitions. Your fear of holding back and holding on are set aside.
- Deeply felt emotions are allowed to rise to the surface. Haven't you ever discovered yourself in tears after a really great laugh?

Find out what makes you laugh and include it in your daily routine.

Own your laugh. By that I mean don't stifle it. If you have a loud laugh, or you're a snorter, or a cackler, chances are you've been discouraged from letting it loose in all of its noisy glory. You're a grown up now. Go ahead and laugh and snort and cackle. If it makes people turn and stare, oh well! Smile and wish them well.

4

Get dirty

Yes, get dirty. Get the stuff all over you, under your nails and caked on your knees. Dig in the soil. Plant something. Build roads and pretend to race toy cars (you do have toy cars don't you?) Squish mud between your toes. Make mud pies. Build mud castles. Smell the richness. Feel the textures. Look close, you might be amazed at all of the treasures and surprises to be found.

Playing in the dirt is good for you! It's GOOD for your health and boosts your happiness! Here's why it works:

There are microbes in soil that make you happier. Happier **and** smarter, how awesome is that? A little bug called *Mycobacterium vaccae* has been found to trigger the release of

serotonin, which in turn elevates mood and decreases anxiety. Add to that, this little bacterium has been found to improve cognitive function and possibly even treat cancer and other diseases. And where do you find it? In dirt!

If you have kids, or know kids, get them to join you. Playing in the dirt actually boosts and strengthens the immune system, particularly in our “anti-bacterial” obsessed society. Kids, adults too, need to be exposed to the natural organisms in dirt.

Plus – playing in the dirt, messing in the mud, planting in the garden is fun.

Now, get out here and get dirty!



5

Indulge your senses

Take a moment and tune into your surroundings. What do you smell? What sounds do you hear? Reach out and touch the surfaces and objects around you. Look around and try to see with fresh eyes, what do you see?

You have five physical senses and in your day to day activities you have to limit what you experience through them. After all, you have stuff to get done, places to go, people to see. If you allowed all the richness around you to flood your senses you wouldn't get much of all that important stuff accomplished. You be just standing or sitting around with a great big smile on your face.

Once in a while it's good to give your senses a treat. To pay particular attention to one or more of them and really experience the gifts they can bestow. Here are ideas for just one of them:

Smell: Let your nose lead your adventures.

- Stop and smell the roses. Yes, it's trite but it's true too. Smell the roses, all the roses, and every other flower you see as you go about your day. The flowers along the path you take as you walk the dog. The flowers on the reception counter at the restaurant where you have lunch. The flowers growing in your neighbor's yard. Heck, how long has it been since you smelled the flowers growing in your own yard? Don't have any flowers in your yard? Buy yourself a bouquet, put it on your desk and ... you guessed it ... smell it.



- Stop into a bakery, or just stand outside and inhale. I love the smell of freshly baked bread. There is a short stretch of Highway 880 in Oakland CA that is often cloaked in the heavenly scent of baking bread and driving through it always gives me a little lift and a big smile.
- Hit the perfume aisle in a department store and sniff the testers. Don't just stick with scents for your gender, mix it up. Find one you like and spray (or dab) some on a tester strip and tuck it into your pocket to enjoy throughout the day.

There are four more senses to indulge. What can you do right now to increase your awareness and pleasure in one or two of them? Connect with what's already around you. There are delightful treats to be found in your day to day routines when you look for them.

6 Try something new. Break your routine

Human beings develop routines. It's natural, in fact is necessary. If you had to think about and decide about every activity of your day, you'd never get anything done. Brushing your teeth would be as much a big deal as deciding on what kind of new car to buy (well, sort of.)

However useful these routines are, they also disconnect us from ourselves and our surroundings. Changing things up a little can reignite our energy, refresh our viewpoint, even spark new ideas.

When you're feeling stale, stuck, or in a rut try a few of these.

- Brush your teeth with your non-dominant hand. Right now you're probably thinking, "That's no big deal." Wait until you try it...not as easy as you think it is. Allow some extra time to clean up the mess.
- Put your shoes on starting with the other foot first. Bet you just had to think about which one you do first and you might even have to try it to find out. See what I mean about routines?
- Take a different route to work, or school, or the store. Even if you just turn left instead of right and go around the block you might be surprised at the things you've never noticed in your neighborhood. Try a back road instead of the freeway (my GPS decides we're going to do this once in a while. We've taken some lovely drives in the country.)
- Do you always sit at the same place at the table, or in the same chair? Take a different seat. Feels a little weird doesn't it? Enjoy the new view, the strange feel of the seat. As a bonus, you've also bumped someone else out of their routine.

- Try a new restaurant or something new at your usual place.
- Ask the bartender what his favorite cocktail is. If it isn't your usual have him or her make one for you.
- If you're inclined to wear "corporate" colors (black, navy, grey, tan, you get the picture) add something bright and colorful. Go bold and do a whole outfit in vibrant color. If, like me, you already dress like that, try something subdued (it's only for one day. You can do it.) Too extreme? Wear mismatched socks.
- Buy, cook, and eat some strange, exotic vegetable. You can find instructions for preparation on the internet, almost guaranteed.

Now that you get the idea, see what else you can do differently? It doesn't have to be forever. You can drop back into your nice comfortable routine. Just remember to peek out of the rut and look around once in a while.

7 Be silly.

• What's wrong with acting silly? Not a damned thing! In fact, silly is good for you. It often results in laughter and laughter really is great medicine. If you're like most adults, all grown up and responsible, you've probably forgotten how to be silly so here are a few ideas to get you started:

- When it's raining, go out wearing an umbrella hat and colorful rain boots. Stomp puddles. Challenge a stranger to a paper boat race in the gutter.
- Run through someone's sprinklers. Here in California, because of the drought, you may have to do it in the wee hours of the morning because no one wants to get caught running their sprinklers in the day time.
- Sing to the store's piped in music while you shop. Go ahead and dance to it too. See who you can recruit to join you.

- Do a Monty Python Silly Walk when crossing the street.
- Pretend you're an airplane. Stick out your arms (gotta have wings to fly) and fly around (add engine sound effects for extra credit.) I love doing this in the wide aisles of the grocery store or just for the hell of it, banking around random street corners.
- Blow bubbles anywhere, everywhere. Elevators are a particular favorite of mine. When I'm alone in an elevator I like to wait until just before the doors open, then fill the space with bubbles which then whoosh out to the surprise and delight of those waiting outside. Only one thing to watch out for is that some people get all stressed out if there's any chance of bubbles landing in their food or drink, just sayin'.

When you stop worrying about what other people think, you find a whole world of fun and laughter open up right in front of you. (And people around you are probably thinking “That looks like fun” or “I wish I was brave enough to be like that”.) Plus, making other people smile, or laugh is a public service. You can’t know whose life you might change in that moment.



Play

If you're like me you have toys on your desk. Grab one and spend a few minutes playing with it. Squeeze the stress ball and throw it at the wall. Blow some bubbles. Flip business cards into a coffee cup. Make a paperclip chain and drape it around your neck or adorn your monitor with it.

Dig out all your highlighters and colored Sharpies and draw. Can't draw? Doodle, scribble, or just make random shapes. Try to balance your pencil on your nose. Build a house of cards with those business cards that you're intending to enter into your database someday.

In addition to using play to take a quick break from your work, look for opportunities to play while you're out an about in the world.



I'm willing to bet that somewhere in your neighborhood is a playground with a swing set. Grab the chance to swing while the kids aren't there. Start out easy if you haven't done it recently. (Ask me how I know.)

Go to the beach and build a sand castle. Collect sticks and stones and other random objects and create abstract sculptures. Write your problems in the wet sand and let the waves wash them away.

Use your phone camera and look for shapes that look like letters. Set yourself the challenge of capturing enough pictures to spell your name.

Skip. Roll in the grass. Climb a tree. Play with a puppy. Let a small child teach you one of their games (no fair taking over or making your own rules.) Stomp puddles. Make mud pies. See shapes in clouds. Count stars. Opportunities to play are everywhere if you only look around and stop worrying about what someone else will think of you.

9

Smile

Feeling grumpy? Woke up cranky? Generally annoyed? Try this.

SMILE

What? You don't feel like smiling? You're probably thinking that it's a stupid idea. How can plastering a fake grin on your face do anything besides annoy you even more? I hear you, and you know what?

Do it anyway.

Your brain thinks that since your face is smiling, you must be feeling pretty good and it reacts accordingly. Pretty soon you aren't faking it anymore and you ARE feeling better. This is a case of fake it 'til you make it that really works.

Smiling also has other benefits;

- It lowers your heart rate and relaxes you. Your stress levels decrease. Lower stress levels equal all kinds of good things, including lower incidence of heart attack.
- It increases your productivity (that whole “whistle while you work” thing has real merit. Sounds strange but it’s true. Take a break and watch a funny video and you’ll be more productive when you get back to work.
- When you smile you encourage trust. I’m sure you’ve heard that people want to do business with people they know, like, and trust. You’re more likely to get to that point when you smile.
- And my favorite: smiling lifts your face and makes you look younger.

Smiles are contagious too, so do your part and spread them around. You’ll feel better and so will the people around you.

10 Dance

Right now! Put an upbeat tune on your nearest audio device, stand up, step away from your desk or chair, and dance.

Shake your butt, wave your arms in the air, and jump around. Do a shimmy (yeah, shake it good.) Do the Stroll or moon walk down the hall. Do the Twist, the Swim, or the Macarena. Pretend you're a ballerina, starring in River Dance, channeling John Travolta, auditioning for Dancing With the Stars, or showing Bob Fosse what you've got.

The old Irish proverb tells us to "dance like no one is watching" so don't think about how you look. It doesn't matter. What matters is how you feel. So even if you don't think you've got the moves, dance anyway. Anyway that feels like fun. Use your whole body!

In addition to being fun, dancing, like so many of these activities, has some wonderful physical and mental benefits. Here are just a few:



- The most obvious is that dancing is good exercise. You can probably recite the benefits of exercise as well as I can so I'll leave that to you and move on to some less obvious benefits
- It can make us smarter. Dancing involves several brain functions all at once: kinesthetic, rational, musical, and emotional. Getting all those functions going at one time, especially learning new dances, builds new neural pathways. New neural pathways equal smarter. It's also a hedge against dementia.
- Dancing improves balance. This is particularly important as we age. Dancing requires a lot of movement and good posture, so frequent dancing will help you stabilize and gain better control of your body.
- A dance class is the perfect setting to make new friends and branch out socially. Maintaining positive relationships may just rank up there with healthy eating and exercise. Being socially engaged leads to increased happiness, reduced stress, and a stronger immune system.

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