



HOBBIES CAN IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

With busy lives and demanding jobs, many people view hobbies as frivolous relics of the past—activities for children, retirees, or other people who have extra free time. That's a mistake. It's actually the busiest people who have the most to gain from engaging in a hobby.

Hobbies and leisure activities that engage your concentration are good for your health, mind, moods, and relationships. When they draw on or grow into a personal passion, they can add meaning and purpose to your life. By pulling your thoughts and your body out of work pressures and daily worries, they can provide a space to recharge your energy and renew your focus.

WHAT IS A HOBBY?

Part of the bad rap given to hobbies these days might be a problem with the name. Think "hobby," and you might have images of ham radio, string collecting, or other quaint activities of your parents' or grandparents' generation. Think instead of a leisure activity that engages your energy and enthusiasm, and you get closer to a hobby's real value. A hobby is a leisure activity (stress on "activity") that you do because you enjoy and are interested in it. It's something you do because you want to. It's also different from pure leisure in that it gets you off the couch, gets you thinking, and challenges you to gain new skills.

Your hobby might be gardening, woodworking, learning about your family history, reading, cycling, exploring nature, drawing, origami, glassblowing, cooking, rock climbing, knitting, playing music, restoring old cars, birding, or any other activity that pulls you out of your work mind and that brings you satisfaction and joy.

KEYS TO CHOOSING A BENEFICIAL HOBBY

Choose a hobby that engages your mind. The benefits of hobbies come from their ability to engage you and remove you from the swirl of everyday concerns. When considering new hobbies, try out activities that challenge you, make you think, and require that you learn new skills. The ideal hobby is one that leads you to experience flow—a state of mind in which you are fully absorbed in what you are doing and can lose track of time.

Choose a hobby for the enjoyment of it. Avoid the temptation to seek out a hobby to provide a second source of income. When a hobby becomes a second job, you may be engaging in it for money instead of for pleasure. Your hobby could become a source of stress rather than a relief from it. Be wary, too, of a hobby that appeals to you mostly because it will teach you skills that are useful in your work. Unless it's fun for you, that's more like job-skills training than an absorbing leisure activity.

HOW HAVING A HOBBY CAN BE GOOD FOR YOU

Hobbies take you out of your everyday routine—with its pressures to meet the demands of other people—and allow you to spend time on activities you yourself enjoy and are passionate about.

Engaging in a hobby can do the following:

GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO TAKE A BREAK AND DO SOMETHING YOU ENJOY.

It's like scheduling "me" time in your calendar. When you engage in a hobby regularly, you make it a habit. Instead of feeling guilty that you're not working, it becomes part of your routine, something you plan your work and other responsibilities around.

PROVIDE A PLEASURABLE BREAK FROM DAILY PRESSURES.

A hobby can keep you from burning out in your job. It can help you carve out moments of personal time in a busy home life.

REDUCE STRESS.

Engaging in an activity you enjoy can be far more effective in pushing worrisome thoughts out of your mind than a passive activity like watching TV.

IMPROVE YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH.

Engaging in enjoyable leisure activities has been found to lower blood pressure, improve perception of overall physical function, and reduce stress and depression.

HELP YOU DEVELOP NEW SKILLS.

When you start a new hobby, you'll dive into a new body of knowledge and acquire new skills. Some of those new skills may serve you well at work and in other aspects of your life.

BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE.

A good new hobby is challenging at first and stretches your abilities. Over time, as you gain mastery, you'll also gain new confidence and a boost in self-esteem.

ENHANCE YOUR CREATIVITY.

Some hobbies, like drawing, writing short stories, knitting or crocheting, jewelry-making, composing music, and designing in wood, require creativity. The more you engage in these activities, the more you'll build your creative abilities.

FORGE NEW SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

Some hobbies, like playing games or music with other people, are naturally social. In engaging in these activities, you make and strengthen social connections. An interest in birding or hiking can lead to new friends with shared interests. Today, even solitary hobbies can lead to social connections by sharing your output, technique, or plans in online communities.



The idea of taking up a hobby for pleasure, diversion, and stress relief can feel at odds with an always-on and always-productive culture. But give it a try. There's little risk and huge potential for improving your life.