

# Intouch

SPRING 2015

ON THE  
FRONT LINE  
OF THE  
EBOLA CRISIS  
ROAD TRIP OF  
A LIFETIME  
KING'S AT THE  
FOREFRONT OF  
DISCOVERY

World questions | KING'S *answers*

KING'S  
College  
LONDON

# Community



## Happiness is... 12th Annual Alumni Weekend 12-14 June 2015

Come back to King's for three days of events, led by King's experts and tailor-made for alumni, including:

- Meet and Q&A with the Principal, Professor Ed Byrne
- The Happily Ever After Ball
- Workshops on mindfulness, achieving your goals and eating happy!

To see the full programme of events and to book your tickets online, please visit:  
[alumni.kcl.ac.uk/alumni-weekend](http://alumni.kcl.ac.uk/alumni-weekend)  
email: [alumoff@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:alumoff@kcl.ac.uk)  
or call: +44 (0)20 7848 3053

## Six ways to make happiness a habit

Dr Tamara Russell on how we can influence our happiness levels

In our fast-paced and often stressful lives, it's easy to forget to think about what actually makes us happy. Several factors influence our happiness. The context in which we find ourselves is a given. Genetic factors also shape how we view the world or process our emotions. However, a large part of what dictates our happiness arises from our own actions – the choices we make, as well as our reaction to life events.

A fundamental way to increase our happiness is to develop greater resilience, and hone our ability to bounce back quickly from difficulties. Easier said than done?

Below are six proven ways to boost your happiness.

### Connect

Make connections with people who inspire you, value you, or share your interests. Look beyond family or friends: connecting with those not in your immediate circle can greatly enhance your happiness.

Meeting old friends at Alumni Weekend is a perfect way to boost your happiness, and I look forward to meeting many of you there!

### Be more active

Regular exercise and physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety. Moving our bodies is particularly important if we spend all day sitting down and working at a computer. If you can, try to exercise outdoors: being 'at one' with nature really is good for you!

### Take notice

Really notice what is around you. Taking time to enjoy each moment not only increases your awareness of the small, pleasurable things in life; it also reduces the brain's capacity to get caught in loops of ruminative thinking. Mindfulness training is one way to significantly improve your ability to engage with each moment and truly 'be present'.

Creative activities such as painting, music, writing and dance, as well as engaging with nature, all contribute to a feeling of being present. You can also increase your ability to notice by taking a regular break from technological distractions, such as tablets and smartphones.

### Learn

Being able to learn is one of the greatest features of our human brain. Challenge yourself to an appropriate level – make sure you get out of your comfort zone. Fear of failure stifles creativity and learning potential, so enter into any learning opportunity with a willingness to embrace failure. Most of our learning comes from when things go wrong, so seeing this as part of the process is critical.

### Give, and be grateful

Helping others and reflecting on the things that we are grateful for can help us see beyond our day-to-day struggles. This counteracts the natural tendency to focus on all the things that are wrong and the constant bombardment from the media of negative events.

It's important to note that although we all aspire to happiness, the ability to engage with the richness of the human experience without getting overwhelmed by the distress is the key to a happy and fulfilling life.

### Trick your body into thinking happy thoughts

Even if our mood is low, we may be able to improve it by putting our bodies into a posture that informs the brain that this is our new mood. Amy Cuddy's TED talk on how body language shapes who we are is fascinating viewing. [www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are)

For instance, if we try to smile, this will naturally improve our mood. Similarly, if we surround ourselves with smiley happy people, our mirroring of these facial expressions will also have a positive effect. Feedback from the body into the brain can therefore influence how we are feeling.

So, even when we find ourselves in tough situations there are still a few things we can do to help us lift our mood. Engaging in activities that stimulate and nurture us can help us to act and think differently. Embracing both positive and negative experiences helps us find equilibrium and – hopefully – a sense of understanding in our lives.

*Dr Tamara Russell is a clinical psychologist at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience and a mindfulness teacher. For more information about her training, visit [www.runriotprojects.org/mindfulness](http://www.runriotprojects.org/mindfulness)*

