

 Happiness Exercise n/a Client No

## Pleasurable Activities Journal

Participating in pleasurable activities presents myriad benefits for both physical and mental wellbeing. Indeed, engaging in activities that bring pleasure has been shown to facilitate recovery from stress, increase positive emotions, improve physiological function and sleep quality, and lead to greater life satisfaction and life engagement [1]. While it is easy to assume that people will be motivated to pursue and participate in activities they find pleasurable, for many, loss of desire and decreased motivation to take part in such activities create a significant barrier [2].

Anhedonia describes a diminished interest in or pleasure from typically pleasurable experiences [2]. This reduced desire to pursue pleasure-giving activities is a symptom of several maladaptive behaviors and mental health disorders, such as major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, and anxiety [3]. Motivational anhedonia is also associated with an impaired ability to weigh up future costs/benefits during decision-making, resulting in choices that reduce exposure to positively reinforcing experiences [2].

To address anhedonia, individuals can 1) take action *before* they feel motivated to participate in pleasurable activities and 2) acknowledge when they have engaged in rewarding behaviors [2]. In doing so, people can make behavioral choices that are likely to increase exposure to positive experiences [2]. Further, writing about pleasant experiences provides opportunities for reflection, helps build enduring personal resources, accelerates recovery from negative emotional states, and increases positive emotions that serve as markers of flourishing and optimal wellbeing [4,5].

This exercise will help clients increase opportunities to experience pleasure by planning and recording their participation in enjoyable activities. In doing so, clients will become aware of and make space for activities that increase positive emotions and improve wellbeing.



### Author

This tool was created by Elaine Houston.



## Goal

The goal of this exercise is to help clients increase opportunities to experience joy by planning and recording pleasurable activities. In doing so, clients will become aware of and make space for activities that boost their mood and improve wellbeing.



## Advice

- Clients should allow ample time to think about the activities they would like to take part in as they complete this exercise. Clients are likely to come up against barriers as they increase pleasurable activities. However, activities do not need to be grand, time-consuming affairs. Activities that take excessive time and effort may be off putting and act as a deterrent. Instead, client activities should be pleasurable, fun, and easy to carry out.
- Clients should avoid activities that may be detrimental to physical or mental wellbeing, such as overuse of unhealthy foods, alcohol, drugs, or gambling.
- A list of potentially pleasurable activities can be found in Appendix A. This list is not exhaustive, and while some clients may already have ideas for activities they would like to take part in, others can use the list for inspiration.



## References

1. Pressman, S. D., Matthews, K. A., Cohen, S., Martire, L. M., Scheier, M., Baum, A., & Schulz, R. (2009). Association of enjoyable leisure activities with psychological and physical well-being. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 71, 725-732.
2. Treadway, M. T., & Zald, D. H. (2011). Reconsidering anhedonia in depression: Lessons from translational neuroscience. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 35, 537-555.
3. Bonanni, L., Gualtieri, F., Lester, D., Falcone, G., Nardella, A., Fiorillo, A., & Pompili, M. (2019). Can anhedonia be considered a suicide risk factor? A review of the literature. *Medicina*, 55, 458.
4. Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218-226.
5. Burton, C. M., & King, L. A. (2004). The health benefits of writing about intensely positive experiences. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 38, 150-163.



## Pleasurable Activities Journal

People find pleasure in a wide range of activities, from watching a favorite film or reading a book to playing video games or cooking a meal from scratch. It is easy to assume people will deliberately seek out and participate in behaviors that bring them joy. In reality, life can throw many obstacles in the way: time constraints, a lack of energy and motivation, and a busy schedule, to name just a few.

And yet, participating in pleasurable activities offers many benefits. It can help you feel less stressed, happier, more optimistic about the future, energized, and help you cope in challenging times. While it might be tempting to wait for the motivation to do something you enjoy, being proactive gives you the best chance of experiencing these benefits.

In this exercise, you will identify, plan, and write about pleasurable activities you take part in. While you may never have kept a journal before, it is a powerful practice that can improve your physical and mental wellbeing and is an essential part of this exercise. Having a written record of your thoughts and feelings will give you opportunities to reflect on your experiences, gain insights, and help you savor and appreciate the pleasure they bring you.

### Step 1: Identifying pleasurable activities

In this step, you will take some time to think about activities that bring you pleasure. Perhaps there are things you once found enjoyable but no longer take part in, or maybe there are activities that you would like to try for the first time.

It is important to allow yourself ample time to think about these activities. Only you know what is the best fit for you personally. Perhaps you love to go to the movies or try out new recipes, or maybe you once played a musical instrument or found pleasure looking up at the stars. Your activities do not need to be expensive or grand affairs; rather, they should be small activities that are easy to carry out.

Write down at least seven pleasurable activities in the space below. Sometimes it can be difficult to think of activities, so if you want some inspiration, you can find a list of potentially pleasurable activities in Appendix A.

My pleasurable activities...



## Step 2: Journaling about pleasurable activities

Now that you have a list of pleasurable activities, it is time to move on to the next step. Each day, for the next seven days, you will choose one activity to take part in and write about. As you carry out each activity, you should immerse yourself fully in the experience. Choose a time when you will not be disturbed, remove any distractions, and give it your undivided attention.

For each of your chosen activities, you will:

- 1) Write a brief description of the activity
- 2) Rate how much pleasure you feel *before* taking part in the activity
- 3) Reflect on your experience
- 4) Rate how much pleasure you feel *after* taking part in the activity

Use the forms in Appendix B to register this information.

## Step 3: Reflection questions

- What did you find most rewarding about this exercise?
- How did it feel to make time for activities that bring you pleasure?
- What challenges or barriers did you face while completing this exercise? How did you overcome these?
- Looking over your journal entries from the past week, what activity brought you the most pleasure? What made this activity so enjoyable?
- In what ways has this exercise changed how you think about making time for pleasurable activities?



## Appendix A: Suggestions for pleasurable activities

### PLEASURABLE ACTIVITIES LIST

- Watch a film you love
- Go for a walk
- Visit a friend
- Play with your pet
- Bake your favorite cake
- Sing along to your favorite song
- Do something creative, like drawing, writing, or painting
- Go out to dinner
- Have a picnic
- Go for a run
- Video chat with a friend
- Kiss your partner
- Go for a bike ride
- Garden
- Take a relaxing bath
- Dance around your living room
- Play a board game
- Buy yourself some flowers
- Look through old photographs
- Explore where you live
- Eat your favorite food
- Enjoy your favorite coffee
- Stargaze
- Spend time in nature
- Go for a drive
- Make time for a hobby
- Go to a museum
- Learn something new
- Watch sports on TV
- Listen to a podcast
- Meditate
- Watch the sunrise/sunset
- Visit an online museum
- Go to a quiz night
- Cook a recipe you have never tried before
- Sit in the sun
- Go to a sporting event
- Watch a documentary
- Try a food you have never eaten before
- Visit a farmers' market
- Go to your local library
- Go to the park
- Visit a thrift store
- Go to the beach
- Try geocaching
- Do a jigsaw puzzle
- Take a free online class



## Appendix B: Pleasurable activity journal

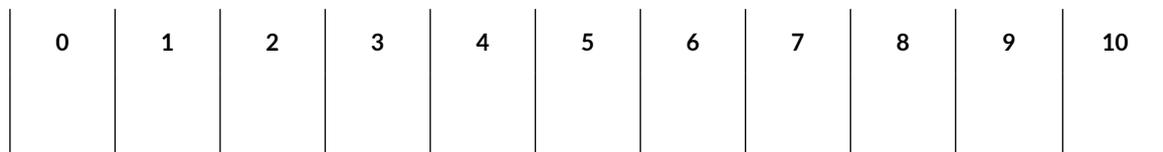
### ■ Activity #1

Date:

#### 1. Today's activity...

#### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

#### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

##### 1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?



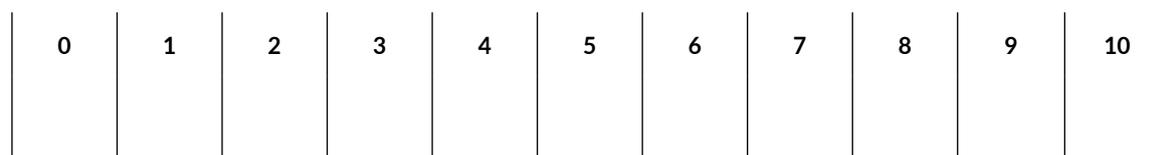
2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)



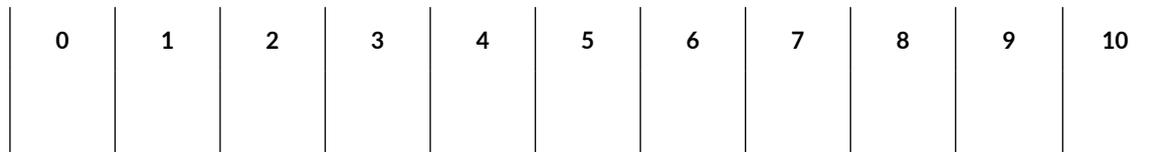
## ■ Activity #2

Date:

### 1. Today's activity...

### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?



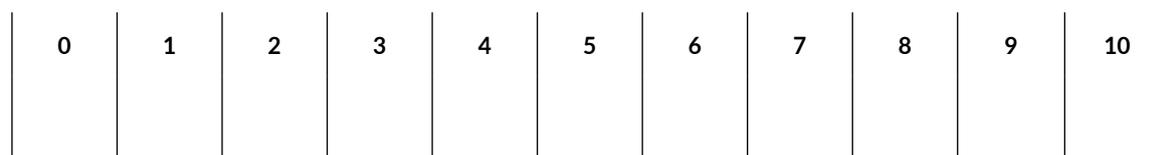
2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)



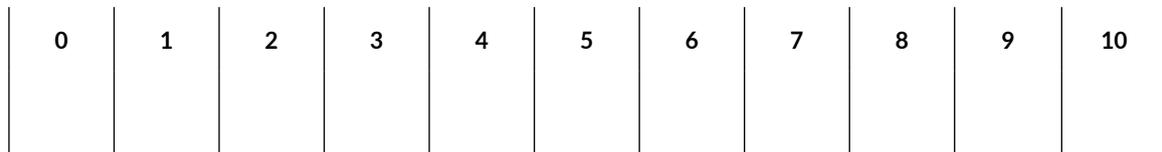
### ■ Activity #3

Date:

#### 1. Today's activity...

#### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

#### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?



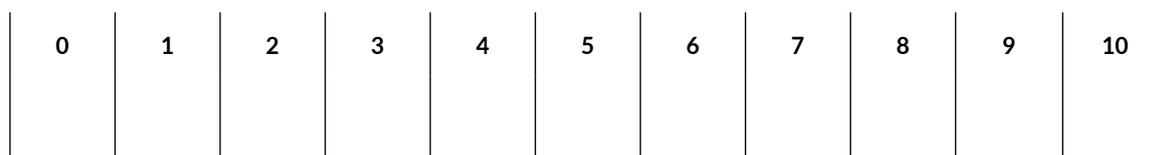
2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)



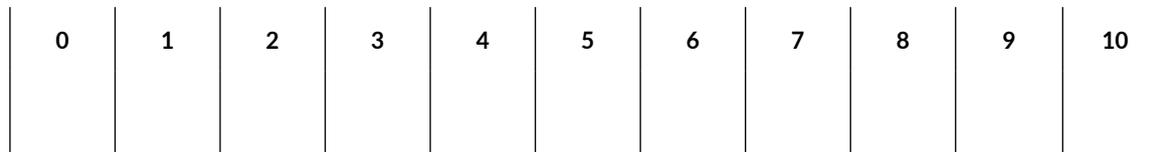
## ■ Activity #4

Date:

### 1. Today's activity...

### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?

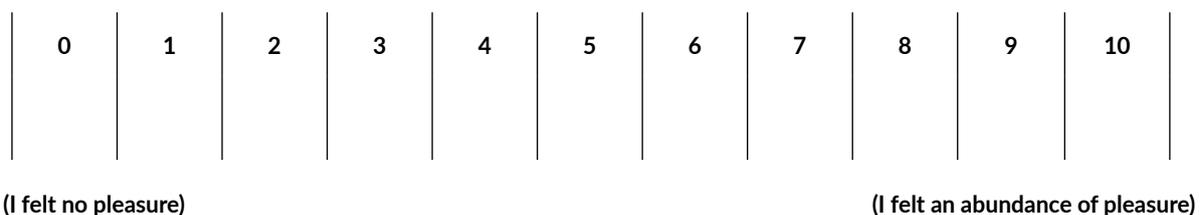
2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.





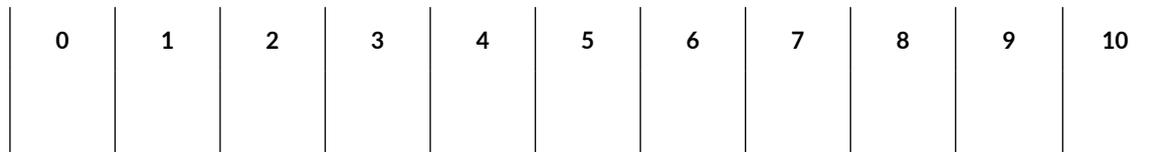
## ■ Activity #5

Date:

### 1. Today's activity...

### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?



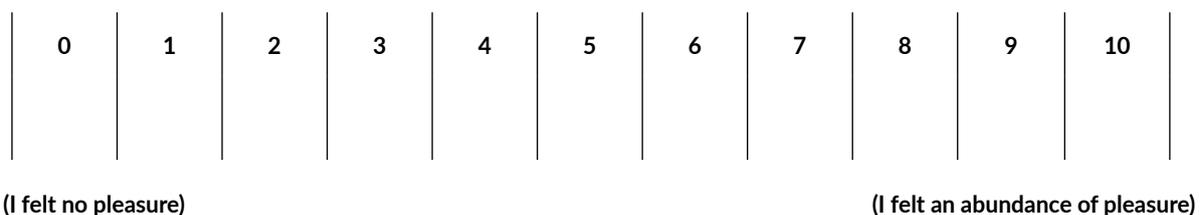
2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.





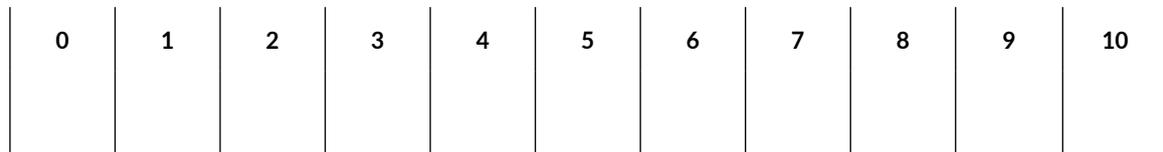
## ■ Activity #6

Date:

### 1. Today's activity...

### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?

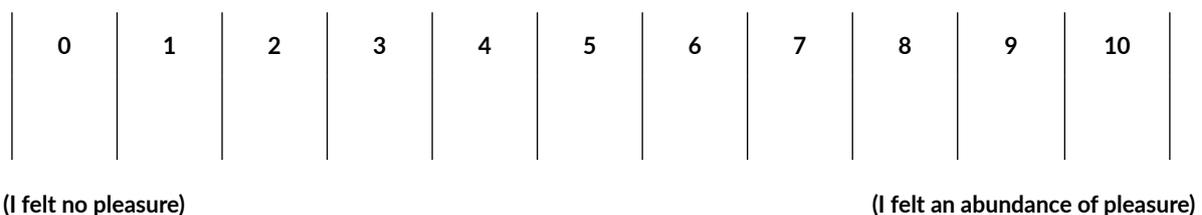
2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.





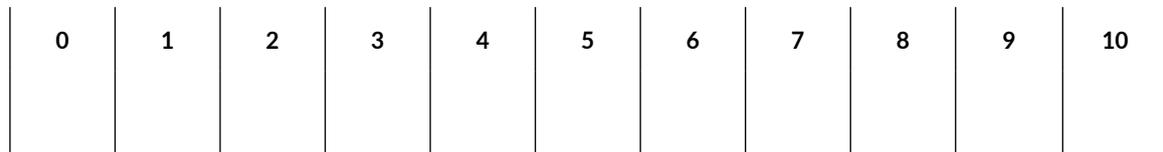
## ■ Activity #7

Date:

### 1. Today's activity...

### 2. Pleasure I felt before the activity...

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt *before* taking part in the activity.



(I felt no pleasure)

(I felt an abundance of pleasure)

### 3. Reflecting on your experience

After carrying out your chosen activity, it is time to reflect on the experience. Take some time to consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *during* the activity?

2. What positive feelings and/or sensations did you experience *after* the activity?

3. What thoughts did you have during the activity?

4. What part of the activity did you find most pleasurable? Why?

**4. Pleasure I felt after the activity...**

On a scale of 0 (I felt no pleasure) to 10 (I felt an abundance of pleasure), use the scale below to rate how you felt after taking part in the activity.

