



EAT. PRAISE. LOVE.

Three magic ingredients
for a happy, healthy life.



Bestselling author Elizabeth Gilbert may have found meaning in life by eating, praying and loving her way around the world – check out *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search For Everything* (Bloomsbury, \$24.95) – but experts reveal the things that make us happy and healthy can often be right under our noses. Meaning there's no need to fork out for a tri-nation spiritual quest! Here's how to find contentment and wellbeing the cheap way.

EAT

Ever wonder why you crave certain “comfort foods” when you’re sick or feeling down? Nutritionist Kristen Beck (beckhealth.com.au) explains the scientific benefits behind their allure.

CHOCOLATE Our favourite sweet indulgence is full of powerful antioxidants called flavonoids, which can help prevent heart attacks and strokes by reducing blood clotting and improving blood flow. “Dark chocolate provides two to four times as many antioxidants as milk chocolate. The amino acid tryptophan, found in small amounts in chocolate, can also reduce anxiety and aid relaxation,” says Beck. What’s more, the release of feelgood endorphins after eating chocolate may also reduce the body’s sensitivity to pain. Now, tell us, is there anything chocolate can’t do?

CHICKEN SOUP There’s arguably no better tonic for the soul than good, old-fashioned chicken soup. The fact that it’s packed full of nutrients, including protein and vitamins A and C, means it’ll help you stay strong while you’re unwell. “Scientific studies from the US also suggest that chicken soup can aid your immune system’s ability to localise white blood cells to fight respiratory infections,” says Beck. “For centuries, chicken soup has been associated with a sense of being cared for, so it can also offer the ‘feelgood’ sensation, which brings psychological benefits of its own.”

RED WINE A glass of vino a day has been linked to longevity and the reduction of heart disease. “Like chocolate, the health benefits of red wine are mostly due to its natural antioxidant content,” says Beck.

OYSTERS “Nutritionally, oysters are rich in the mineral zinc, which is essential for reproduction (especially in men), vision and exercise performance,” says Beck. Oysters also contain high levels of riboflavin (vitamin B2), which regulates

red blood cell growth. And because these little gems are regarded as a delicacy in Western culture, we’re likely to associate them with feelings of luxury and comfort.

PRaise

Renowned writer Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment”, which eloquently describes how we all crave a verbal pat on the back from time to time. Learning how to give (and receive) good, authentic feedback takes practice, but performance coach Louise Carter (performancepartnership.com.au) says the benefits are worth it.

“It isn’t as culturally accepted to give praise in Australia compared with [for example] America. This means many of

us have grown up not experiencing giving or receiving praise,” says Carter.

Authentic praise is different from “flattery” – the ultimate purpose of your feedback is to support and encourage the other person, rather than getting them to like you. And if you’re on the receiving end of compliments, there are also a few golden rules to follow.

“People who get the most out of praise are those who accept it. The best thing you can do for yourself is to realise that a compliment is the other person’s valid perception of the situation, so accept it in good grace. [Over time], the better you become at accepting praise, the more your unconscious mind will believe it,” says Carter.

After you’ve mastered the art of receiving a good wrap from your peers, be sure to give yourself a boost every now and then, too. Carter explains, “Remember that while external sources of feedback are important, so is what you say internally. So aim to praise yourself at the end of each day and give yourself a big pat on the back for all the things you achieved.”

LOVE

Most of us will agree that love has a lot to answer for, including Facebook stalking, angst-ridden text analysis and other inexplicable impulse-driven behaviours. However, counsellor Julie Parker (julie-parker.com.au) believes that the brain chemicals that occasionally keep us tossing and turning at night can also be beneficial for our health.

“In the initial throes of passion and romance, falling in love releases serotonin in our brain, making us feel more alive, happy and vibrant. This, in turn, can ward off things like depression and anxiety, and make us feel stronger and more able to handle situations that previously may have really challenged us,” says Parker.

“FALLING IN LOVE MAKES US FEEL MORE ALIVE, HAPPY AND VIBRANT ... AND CAN WARD OFF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY.”

Research conducted at the University of North Carolina has shown that women who spend time in close physical contact with their partners (including hugging and kissing) have lower blood pressure and better heart health. But the benefits aren’t limited to romantic love.

A new study published in medical journal *PLoS Medicine* discovered that social connectedness is also incredibly important to physical health and can add years to our lives. “Feeling loved by friends and respected by colleagues and community members gives us confidence, raises our self-esteem and can even boost our immune system. This is just a few of the reasons why we should never take good friends and relationships for granted,” says Parker.

Above all, don’t forget to nurture the relationship you have with yourself, which is the most important. “Treating ourselves well takes time, effort and commitment – just like any relationship we have,” says Parker. “The best way to live the life we want is to love and believe in who we are and the contribution we are making to the world.” □