

Celebrate Life's Milestones! It's GOOD for You!



The anticipation of reward helps us keep going.



By Eve Menezes Cunningham

When did you last take the time to celebrate an enormous accomplishment? What about a smaller achievement? How about all the little steps on the way to finishing a project? Or a seemingly tiny but scary first step on the path to an unknown destination?

It may seem self-indulgent but celebrations, tiny and triumphant, not only help us feel good while we celebrate but, if we do it often enough, condition us in a way that motivates us to accomplish more in the future.

Whether it's taking a break after meeting a deadline with 30 minutes of TV or (when travel becomes safe enough again) a holiday to celebrate the completion of a four-year course, the anticipation of reward helps us keep going.

It creates dopamine, a feel-good chemical associated with rewards. The more we create, the more intensely we crave the next hit. While, unfortunately, this is a factor in addictions, we can use the knowledge about how we're wired to create and maintain healthier habits in a way that makes celebrations an everyday part of life.

Happy 70th issue, Report Magazine!

Wow. Seventy issues! I was delighted to join the editorial team in the early

days and have, I think, written for every issue since 2007, deepening my own knowledge of NLP and having the privilege of interviewing an amazing range of famous and less known but just as inspirational souls.

When we take the time to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries as well as other events, we end up reflecting on how the process (be it a small project or watching your child turn 21 or graduate / become a parent etc.) has changed us. How, at times, it was fun and at other times, we had to dig deep to carry on.

This may be through gathering coursework and rereading old essays, or selecting photos of your child from babyhood to becoming a parent themselves. It may be a wedding or anniversary and you, through the act of celebrating with a simple meal or full-on party (pandemic permitting), remembering falling in love and overcoming challenges to create a strong partnership.

Celebrations can be simple, where you take time to do something for yourself, or communal, where lots of people are involved. It might be free or something that you need to save up for over time. Either way, it's about honouring your efforts and accomplishments. In the case of birthdays, your mere *presence* on the planet becomes celebration-worthy (in whatever way feels good for you).

Solitary celebrations

If you're tempted to write off the idea while we're in lockdown after lockdown, get creative. It might be dessert after dinner, or an indulgent Yoga Nidra (a guided relaxation) after your physical yoga practice. Studies show that Yoga Nidra increases dopamine by up to 70%. It not only feels relaxing and indulgent in the moment but aids the creation of dopamine, enhancing that feel-good factor and boosting your motivation to do more yoga.

Schedule in some celebrations

Think about your month ahead and write a list of all the things you'll be accomplishing.

Now allocate each an appropriate level of treat and make a note of each next to the task. How do you feel as you anticipate each reward?

It's important that you keep your word to yourself so your brain chemistry literally learns to anticipate each reward – not necessarily knowing when it's coming but that you will honour it.

Some may not be possible while the world is on pause but anticipating the loved ones we'll see again and places we'll go will make our eventual hugs, celebrations, parties, meeting new people, returning to loved places and exploring new ones even sweeter. ■

Eve Menezes Cunningham: Access Yoga Nidras and other free resources as well as information about Eve Menezes Cunningham's book, *365 Ways to Feel Better: Self-care Ideas for Embodied Wellbeing* (White Owl, 2017) and self-care coaching, therapies (including NLP) and supervision for multiskilled therapists and coaches at selfcarecoaching.net/more-mind-body-practices-for-self-care