

Break these happiness rules

to feel better than ever!

With life's hectic pace, it's only natural that we look for shortcuts to bliss. And so we turn to old adages that, by outlining ways to reach goals, seem to be handy helpers. The problem: Many of the rules we've internalized have actually been proven to do more harm than good. Here, a quick corrective that will speed your way to serenity!

OLD RULE: "If I do everything perfectly, then I'll be happy."

Once you get that raise, you'll finally feel content...right? Research from the new field of *positive psychology* has revealed that "big wins" actually deliver fairly small feel-good payouts. Plus, by focusing only on the future, you're guaranteed to be disappointed with where you are right now, notes Dana Lightman, Ph.D., a psychotherapist and author of *Power Optimism* (Power Optimism, LLC, 2004).

NEW RULE: "Just by pursuing excellence, I'll feel great."

"Seeking greatness acknowledges that there will always be room for improvement," says Lightman. It's a more flexible mind-set that allows you to grow and evolve and reminds you that it's not the destination that's important but the journey.

OLD RULE: "Getting my hopes up will jinx my joy."

If you're like many women, you worry that feeling optimistic will set you up for a letdown. But actually, bracing

for the worst can often bring it on. "Focusing on warding off disappointment trains your mind to concentrate on the negative," cautions Dan Baker, Ph.D., author of *What Happy Women Know* (Rodale, 2007). "And that can set up a self-fulfilling prophecy."

NEW RULE: "I'll get ahead by seeing a best-case scenario."

It's one of those truisms that really is true: No one ever achieved a success that she didn't envision first. So if you're worried about hosting that baby shower, think of how everyone will love the decorations you created. "This shifts your focus to what you can control to create a positive situation," says Lightman.

OLD RULE: "I can't expect to be happy all the time."

Many women believe that happiness is a "special occasion" emotion, reserved for birthdays and vacations. This kind of thinking wastes precious time. It can also be a setup for disappointment when the high expectations placed on the "happy occasion" aren't fulfilled.

NEW RULE: "Happiness is possible on a daily basis."

By reconceptualizing big overarching "happiness" into little joys, you can feel bliss every day, says Lightman. How? Focus on gratitude. For example, think *thank you* when you nab that primo parking spot. "This retrains the brain to look for the positive in everything," says Lightman. And that makes a sunny outlook the norm!

