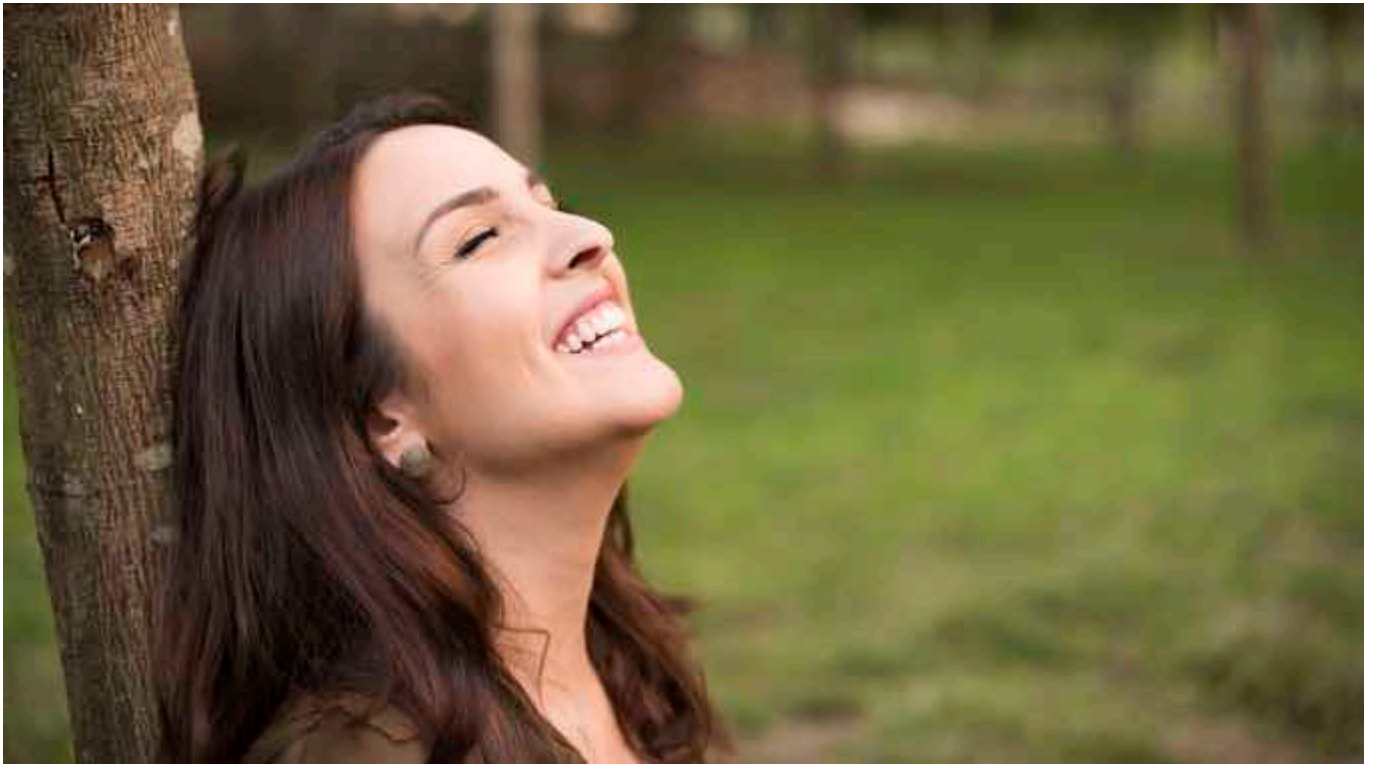


# Science Reveals that Wellbeing is a Skill You Can Learn, Practice and Strengthen



By [Kate Love](#) | [Uplift Connect](#)

Wellbeing is something that is hard to define and yet we all have an understanding of what it is. It derives from how you feel about yourself and your life, whether things are going well, and how you cope with stress. Wellbeing changes over time and is influenced by every aspect of our lives, from close friendships to feel that you belong and a sense of purpose.

Neuroscientist [Richard J. Davidson](#), the founder of the [Center for Healthy Minds](#), is one of the world's leading experts on the impact of contemplative practices, such as mindfulness meditation, on the brain. He says that wellbeing is not a

static 'thing'—but a set of skills that we can practice and strengthen, just like learning to play a musical instrument or ride a bike.

*“Wellbeing is fundamentally no different than learning to play the cello. If one practices the skills of wellbeing, one will get better at it”*

## **The Four Keys to Wellbeing**

Research reveals there are four areas of mental training that can significantly improve your wellbeing: Resilience, outlook, [awareness](#), and generosity. “Each of these four is rooted in neural circuits, and each of these neural circuits exhibits plasticity,” explains Davidson. “So we know that if we exercise these circuits, they will strengthen.”

It's easy to be content when things are going well but what about when we face hardship? I'll never forget the moment when my mum told me that she had breast cancer. It is in times like these that we need the strong foundation of wellbeing to hold us up.

Practicing these four skills can provide the key to enduring change and increased wellbeing.

### **1. Resilience**

Resilience, or how quickly we recover from adversity, influences the amount of negative emotion that we experience. My mum was a doctor who cared for other people, the one who held our family together, and it was a shock to recognize her vulnerability.

Some people recover from a failed exam or loss of a job slowly, while others are able to rebound more easily from adversity.

*“We know that individuals who show a more rapid recovery in certain key neural circuits have higher levels of wellbeing. They are protected in many ways from the adverse consequences of life’s slings and arrows.”*

One of the ways that Davidson has found to improve your resilience is by regular practice of [mindfulness](#) meditation. It takes time to alter these specific brain circuits and you need many hours of practice before you see real change. “It’s not something that is going to happen quickly,” he says. “But this insight can still motivate and inspire us to keep meditating.”

## **2. Outlook**

Whether it’s savoring the last bite of chocolate cake or enjoying a family holiday, a positive outlook on life increases our wellbeing. “I use outlook to refer to the ability to see the positive in others,” says Davidson. “The ability to savor positive experiences, the ability to see another human being as a human being who has innate basic goodness.”

Even people who suffer from [depression](#) show activation in the brain circuit underlying outlook, but in them, it doesn’t last—it’s very transient.

*“Here, unlike with resilience, research indicates that simple practices of loving-kindness and compassion meditation may alter this circuitry quite quickly, after a very, very modest dose of practice.”*

I couldn’t take my mum’s cancer away but I could be there for her, spend time holding her hand, and go for long walks together on the beach. I savored every moment I had with her because I didn’t know how long it would last.

A recent study by Healthy Minds found that compassion training for 30 minutes a day for two weeks resulted not only in changes in the brain but also made it more likely for people to be kind and help others.

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