

# Fast Forward: Purpose Exercise

One key element in the formula for well-being is purpose: belonging to and serving something that is bigger than self.

Finding your meaning or purpose in life can also improve your health. In 2003, Barbara Fredrickson and Steve Cole compared the immune cells of people who reported being "happy" with those of people who reported "a sense of direction and meaning," the people leading meaningful lives seemed to have stronger immune systems.

Imagine fast-forwarding to the end of your life and to answer the following questions:

- How, and for what, do I want to be remembered?
- By whom do I want to be remembered?
- Which of my accomplishments and personal strengths would I want others to talk about?
- When I look back, am I satisfied with the life I have lived?
- Am I living my life in such a way now that this will be achieved?

Answering these questions can help you to start identifying whether you are living according to your values, whether you are achieving your goals, and whether your life is as you wish it to be.

If the answer to questions 4 and 5 is 'no', think about what small changes you can make to ensure that you are heading in the right direction now.

- What can you realistically do?
- Which things are within your control?
- What are goals I can set to help me increase meaning in my life?
- What are you currently doing which will move you towards this goal?

Write down your responses in your well-being journal. Keep your responses safe and look at them again, say in a few months or a year's time. Ask yourself whether you have made progress towards your goal(s). Feel free to revise your goal(s) as you learn more about yourself and what well-being means to you. Sometimes people think that their life purpose should suddenly become clear in a kind of epiphany, but according to research it's often a slower process, a gradual realization which takes place over time.