



Episode 2

## **Savouring the moment: leveraging the power of your mind to get more joy out of life.**

Hello and welcome to Episode 2 of Soundbites powered by the AbbVie Care program, bringing you the most up-to-date health and lifestyle advice.

I'm your host, **Aaron Sihota**, a pharmacist from Vancouver, BC, and I work very closely with specialists in the rheumatology and dermatology community as well as being Clinical Faculty at the University of British Columbia. Soundbites is inspired by 15 years of learning from thousands of AbbVie Care program members and is one of a kind in the Canadian space.

Life can be a roller coaster, and it can be easy to feel small and at the mercy of whatever life decides to throw at us at any given moment. If this resonates with you, you're definitely not alone.

In today's podcast, we'll dissect that feeling a little bit and discuss a few ideas for how we can master that feeling of helplessness and then capitalize on the little joys in life in order to better manage those inevitable pitfalls when they arise. In other words, we will talk about savouring, taking the time to linger and appreciate our experiences.

We've all had those days where everything goes right. When you really feel at your best. Your day starts off on the right foot and only gets better – those days where life feels almost too good to be true. We experience a few positive and rewarding events in a row and they put a little extra wind in our sails so we begin to feel unstoppable. The lights turn green, there is no traffic, the sky looks extra blue, the people we encounter are friendly and helpful. On a day such as this, we smile at the people we see, and we have a little extra motivation which could even lead us to trying something new or making exciting plans for the future.

And then there are the other days, the bad days. We've also all had days where we feel like everything is working against us, and we just can't catch a break. All the annoying little things start to add up. Maybe you stub your toe, you burn your tongue, you hit all the red lights and the traffic is impossible or you miss your bus, and now you're late. Someone gives you a funny look or says something that puts you in a bad mood. On their own, none of these things are the end of the world but when you run into enough little irritations in a row it can really affect your general outlook, and the way you behave and move through your day.

Now, let's suppose that your great day and your terrible day were actually not all that different. Consider the possibility that on your bad day you actually had more control than you thought you did for turning that day around.

Perhaps on the bad day, something frustrating happened that got your mind into a state where you were thinking more negatively. That negative fixation preoccupied you with negative thinking that blinded you to the good things that were happening at the same time. Maybe life was throwing little gifts your way but you were too focused on what was going wrong to see them. When negative things happen, they tend to have a snowball effect. All the little negative things start to accumulate and build and gain a life of their own and the next thing you know, it feels like there's nothing you can do to stop that snowball from rolling down a hill. It's rolling so fast now that you are not able to see anything positive around you.

First of all, when this happens, don't panic: there are things you can do to regain a sense of ownership over the circumstances around you. And keep in mind that whatever you're not taking control of, is very likely controlling you. So how do you regain control?

Start with being more mindful and conscious that these are just passing feelings; you've already started the process of stopping that snowball from rolling out of your control.

When we end up in a positive state of mind, we are more prone to seeing positive things and when we are in a negative state, we are more likely to see the negative. We often find what we are searching for and what we find begins to dominate our conscious experience.

Our minds are very susceptible to negative patterns of thinking. When our thinking is negative, we are more likely to recall all the crummy things in our lives like the misfortunes, the insults, the losses, the regrets or missed opportunities. And through this, we let the bad dilute the good instead of empowering the good to dilute the bad.

If you choose to think about what went right, even during those days when it seems like the bad keeps knocking you down, you might be surprised by how many joyful things are actually there all around you.

So what can we do to create a positive mindset? We can train our minds to appreciate the beauty and joy of our surroundings. We can savour our positive experiences. For example, think about a really good meal that you had recently. You can probably remember the glorious smell of the food, the people you were sharing it with and the way it made you feel. Maybe you even ate slower because you wanted to enjoy every bite. Then try to approach all of your positive experiences that way.

When something goes right, honour it by staying with that feeling a bit longer. You can also still recognize the negative things, but you don't have to let it ruin your day.

Think about what happens when you turn on the television, scroll social media, open a newspaper or look at notifications on your phone. Billions of dollars are invested every day in bringing you information about what is going wrong in the world.

Research indicates that even people who prefer to hear the good news pay greater attention to the bad news. The bad news is often perceived as more actionable compared to good news and therefore our brain mistakenly thinks it is of greater importance to listen to.

This is because negative thoughts are sticky – like the stickiest kind of Velcro – while positive thoughts wash away so easily like an egg on a non-stick pan!

To break the negativity that is all around us, you have to intentionally bring positives into the day and make the positive thoughts more Velcro-like. Even on days that don't go so well, having hope about the expectation of a better tomorrow is a way to remain optimistic.

One way to do this is through a positive psychology practice known as savouring. It is a strategy you can use to let more light into your mind. Like pulling back a curtain to let the sun fill a dark room – when you practise savouring the moment, that moment gets even better and your thinking patterns are more likely to shift toward the positive and start looking for more positive. For example, what are you feeling, what do your surroundings look like, are you with someone? If yes, think of what they mean to you. It just gets easier and easier the more you practise.

Sometimes we race past the happier moments of accomplishment to get to the next thing, but there is good reason to savour the experience and lock it into your memory to celebrate your successes and the good in your life. An added bonus is that we tend to remember these positive experiences more easily.

Savouring is about relishing in the moment. It is an ability to notice and appreciate experiences, events, feelings, and the good in your life. The goals accomplished don't have to be the end-goal or large goals like being able to run a marathon. It could be something like going for a walk and taking the time to pay attention to what we see, hear, smell and feel. Do we hear birds, rustling of leaves, a honking horn? When we look, let's take the time to really see; look at the tree, the leaves, the branches, the sky shining through. Do we feel the wind on our face, the grass under our feet? What emotions are we experiencing? Sense as if you are having the experience for the first time.

The same can be done for starting a new exercise routine, or a new habit for bettering your health, or maybe you've started taking a brand new medication or a new recreational activity. Think about the bigger picture; for example, following your physician's treatment plan has helped you reach your goal or will help you reach a future goal so you can focus on that goal and savour what that outcome may feel like. Notice the little improvements along the way for yourself and savour each one.

Then, think about why the experience was important to you. Tune into whatever is beautiful or hopeful about the experience, knowing that this increases dopamine and norepinephrine, which are the “feel good” chemicals in our body. Then, do something to express this emotion even if you are just expressing it silently to yourself. You may also want to say something out loud to someone who is sharing the moment with you. This will help to make it last longer and make the moment more meaningful and real.

Others in our life will likely respond well to expressions of positive emotions, which can then further generate more positive emotions in ourselves. It's nice to grab hold of these positive moments, big and small, and stay with the experiences in a more intentional way.

An easy way to start is by really taking the time to savour your morning coffee. Take a little moment and do nothing but enjoy and appreciate that one thing all on its own and appreciate it for what it is. Feel the joy it gives you, inhale its aroma with a deep breath, feel the joy it gives you and the way it makes you feel more invigorated.

If you're willing, let's try savouring together!

Start by thinking about a joyful, happy or pleasant event that happened in the past few days. Remember that this can be small and even something rather ordinary.

What were the positive emotions that you remember feeling around the time of the event? What positive feelings were you experiencing?

What else about the happy experience makes you feel good, even remembering it now?

Consider what it is that makes you feel grateful about that experience.

How can you express the positive emotion, even now, in your facial expression and body language?

Finally, think about who you would tell about this happy moment and go tell them right now. People are always receptive to hearing positive thoughts and this may even have a positive effect on their day.

You may be surprised at how this simple practice of spotting, appreciating and savoring the little joys in life, can improve our quality of life and our view of the world. And when we've gained that kind of control, we'll start controlling the quality of our lives rather than the other way around. Life is a lot better than we think, so here's to the good life!

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