

Dr William Bloom is founder of the Spiritual Companions Trust and developed the new UK qualification the Diploma in Practical Spirituality and Wellness. His many books include *The Endorphin Effect* and *The Power of Modern Spirituality*. spiritualcompanions.org



Did you know there's a wealth of evidence for the health benefits of spirituality? In fact there are over three thousand academic papers on how it can boost and sustain your physical and psychological health and research suggests that people with spirituality live longer. It reduces the risk of mental illness too and supports general emotional wellbeing. So how best can you boost your own spirituality? Here are some suggestions that might work for you...

Get connected to the goodness of life: Here's the most important question: When do you most easily connect with the goodness, wonder and energy of life? When do you feel flow and magic in your life? It may only last for a few seconds but give it attention and make a list of when it happens for you. It might be when you're exercising, meditating, reading, listening to music, caring for others, cooking, gardening or with friends and family. Value these moments and repeat them as often as you can.

Surrender mindfully: Don't do the activities you've recognised through the first exercise carelessly, do them mindfully. Notice when there's a hum and a goodness in your life no matter how subtle it might be, and then pause. Soften your breath. Let your stomach sink and be at ease, and drop down into your body. Appreciate the positive feeling and maybe give thanks. Experiment with letting the feeling in more deeply.

Practise the inner smile: The 'inner smile' is taught in many spiritual traditions. In Buddhism, for example, it is called metta, and refers to loving kindness to self. It is a natural

Deepen Your SPIRITUALITY

Dr William Bloom, founder of the Spiritual Companions Trust, shares six ways to boost your spirituality – and improve your health and wellbeing at the same time

empathic skill. It is the same as caring for a small child who has grazed their knee: You bend down, you reassure and you look carefully at the graze. Now focus that same caring attitude down into your own body. This practice sends wonderful health-giving messages through your neuro-endocrinal system.

Give the natural world more attention: There's a scientific name for our built-in positive response to the natural world: biophilia. Because our bodies are made up of the same atomic stuff as the stars and the earth, we have an innate and deep connection with nature. Some people – scientists and pagans – think this is the source of our spiritual impulse, so be aware of nature as much as you can.

Be comfortable with unknowing: One of the most useful and profound spiritual practices is that of emptying. When you are feeling at ease and relaxed, experiment with the idea that you don't need to know everything and that the whole of existence is one wonderful mystery. Allow your mind to relax on the sun-lounger of unknowing.

Care for others: Finally, make sure that you care for others as often as possible. Be a loving and compassionate presence for friends, family, colleagues and even people in the supermarket queue. This is good for them and it is also good for you. Being kind and compassionate triggers a positive hormonal state, supporting your own health, and also connects you with the spiritual goodness of life.