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Can Crafting Really Make You Happier and Healthier?

We found a great article on Scrapbook.com that breaks it down for us why crafting can in fact, make us happier and healthier. For your reference, the article can be found here: <https://www.scrapbook.com/articles/crafting-makes-you-healthier-and-happier>



Can Crafting Really Make You Healthier & Happier?

There's no doubt, electronic devices have made human communication faster, brought a mind-boggling amount of information to our fingertips, and have made getting directions a whole lot easier than 'turn right where the old mill used to be...'. While this increased access is amazing and convenient, it might also be leading us away from an important human activity: handmade creation.

Here at Scrapbook.com, over the last 6 months, we've researched extensively the effects of screen time (time spent on digital devices) and conversely, the positive effects of crafting and other handmade creativity. We've read books and scoured studies and we even conducted our own survey of over 1,500 people to try and understand it better. The resulting data is presented below in a comprehensive - and fun - article. Without giving too much away, this article will likely change the way you think about crafting - and screen time - forever.

Too Much Screen Time is Unhealthy

In order to understand the solution, we must first understand the problem. Too much screen time is bad for your mental and physical health. The average adult

spends over 11 hours looking at a screen every day. We watch TV, play games, read news, laugh at cute videos of cats and communicate rapidly via digital devices. Certainly our TVs, computers, tablets and phones are beneficial in many ways, but are we sacrificing our health and happiness on the altar of entertainment, convenience and productivity? Research consistently shows that screen time is directly linked to increased incidences of obesity in adults and children. It can also negatively affect our sleep habits, change how our brains are structured, make us vulnerable to metabolic syndrome, lead to eye strain, affect our posture, give us headaches and even raise our likelihood of premature death. In short, the human mind and body aren't built to stare at a glowing rectangle all day.

Our Modern Lifestyle Can Increase Anxiety and Depression

It's not just digital devices that are problematic. We live in a historic time of convenience where nearly everything we need or want is pre-made, packaged and available for immediate purchase. We don't have to grow our own food or raise our own cattle. We don't have to make our own clothes or thank-you cards. It seems everything we need can be delivered to our doorstep with the click of a mouse or touch on our phone. That's a problem because we're hardwired to create things with our hands, and our brains need the handmade self-expression. Consider that the rate of depression in industrialized nations has increased tenfold over the last 60 years. That steep rise coincides directly with rapid technological advancements. Meanwhile, the Amish communities in the U.S., who create almost everything they have by hand, have very low incidences of depression.

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Neuroscientist Kelly Lambert, in her book *Lifting Depression* explains, "No matter how enriching or pleasurable we find surfing the Web, emailing, listening to our iPods, reading a novel, or watching *American Idol*, our brains still crave the feelings associated with survival-based outcomes that were so important in its own evolution. We're programmed to experience satisfaction and a sense of well-being after we exert meaningful effort and use our hands..." Or, in other words, we were born with opposable thumbs for a reason, and it's not so that we can text faster! She goes on to explain that, in modern society, we rarely engage the brain areas that control creativity using the hands and that can lead to malaise and even mild to medium depression. Perhaps we've reached a point in modern society where, for most us, making things by hand is - from a practical standpoint - almost entirely unnecessary, and yet it's also simultaneously critical for our physical and emotional health.

Crafting is a Natural Antidepressant

"Crafting: it's cheaper than therapy." Most any crafter will nod emphatically in agreement...even after restocking their paper and glitter stash. Crafting can actually function as a natural antidepressant. Carrie Barron, M.D., a psychiatrist and the co-author of *The Creativity Cure: How to Build Happiness With Your Own Two Hands*, published an article that asserts, "Creating something with your hands fosters pride and satisfaction, but also provides psychological benefits. When you make something, you feel productive, but the engagement and exploration involved in the doing can move your mind and elevate your mood." She explains that handmade self-expression can even help us to let go of negative thoughts or experiences: "You may or may not be conscious of what perturbs you, but creative action with your hands, mind, and body can turn undermining forces into usable energies." Lambert also explores the psychological and emotional benefits of handmade crafts and comes to similar conclusions: "It seems clear that tasks involving the hands - cooking, gardening, crafts - have a therapeutic effect on many people." And "we get a deep sense of emotional satisfaction and well-being when we do something that requires physical effort, including coordination and especially movement of the hands."

"Creating something with your hands fosters pride and satisfaction, but also provides psychological benefits. When you make something, you feel productive, but the engagement and exploration involved in the doing can move your mind and elevate your mood."

Hello Happy Crafting

Andrew Brink of the Department of Psychiatry at McMaster University says in his book that creativity is "the original antidepressant". Crafting doesn't just help keep anxiety and depression away, it can actually put us in a great mood. Barron says, "Creativity is a powerful tool for changing inner states because constructing, inventing, and expressing ourselves makes us happy." Creativity is necessary for wellness and contentment. Tell that to your family the next time you're engrossed in a project and they're begging for clean socks!

Crafting Gets You Into a Flow State

Speaking of being engrossed...you know when you become completely absorbed in a task and lose track of time or even thought? Have you ever experienced this while making a scrapbook page, creating a card or knitting? Have you ever picked your kids up late from school because of this? (Don't worry--you're not the first!) This state is similar to meditation. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called this phenomenon Flow and defined it as "a few moments in time when you are so completely absorbed by an activity that nothing else seems to matter". With decades of research to support his claim, Csikszentmihalyi asserted that

Flow is "the secret to happiness".

Crafting can put us into a flow state. Barton explains, "Functioning hands also foster a flow in the mind that leads to spontaneous joyful, creative thought....Consider how you felt the last time you made something by hand. Whether it was a cake, a home improvement project, a garden, or a scrapbook, it was absorbing and satisfying, right? Maybe you even had a moment or more of euphoria." She explains that the joy is found in the act of creation, and those creative moments can elevate our mood and make us happier. Neuroscientist Kelly Lambert, affirms that "Any activity that requires you to use your hands, and that you enjoy, especially if it puts you in the flow zone, will energize your effort-driven rewards circuit."

Crafting Makes You More Relaxed and Less Stressed

Keep Calm and Craft On. A trendy sentiment that's truer than you might realize. The process of creating and being in 'flow' relaxes and calms the human body. For example, the repetitive motions of knitting, the act of cutting paper, or rubber stamping can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which quiets that "fight or flight" response and gives us a sense of peace and happiness.

Keep Calm and Craft On Layout

Robert Reiner, a clinical psychologist at Behavioral Associates Psychotherapy Institute conducted a study where researchers asked 30 women to carry out a series of leisure-based activities. The researchers measured the stress levels of the women during those activities by actively monitoring their heart rates, perspiration, skin temperature and blood pressure. The activities included playing cards, sewing a project, painting at an easel, playing a video game and reading a newspaper. The results of the study showed that sewing was the most relaxing of the activities followed by painting. Sewing produced drops in blood pressure, drops in heart-rate and drops in perspiration levels. Reiner concluded that "The act of performing a craft is incompatible with worry, anger, obsession, and anxiety. Crafts make you focus on the here and now and distract you from everyday pressures and problems. They're stress-busters in the same way that meditation, deep breathing, visual imagery and watching fish are." And just for the record, given the choice between fish-watching and scrapbooking, we'd take scrapbooking every. Single. Time. No offense to you fish-watchers, of course.

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Handmade Self-Expression Can Improve Your Health

Turns out, crafting might be some of the best medicine. In 2010, the American Journal of Public Health published an extensive article about the health benefits of creative expression. The researchers for the article looked at more than 100 reports and analyzed the impact of creative expression - through arts, crafts and music - on the mental, emotional and physical health of patients. Several of the studies they explored focused on patients who were battling chronic illness or cancer. One study in particular focused on Women with Breast Cancer and looked at the benefits of Arts and Crafts. Some of the benefits of creative expression and crafting were:

Improved well-being by decreasing negative emotions and increasing positive ones

_ Improved medical outcomes and trends toward reduced depression _

_ Less thoughts of illness _

_ Reductions in stress and anxiety _

** Improvements in flow and spontaneity, positive identity, and social networks*

When these patients engaged in regular handmade creative expression they were happier and healthier and they felt enhanced their self-worth. An impactful study like this one shows that if crafting can help elevate the feelings and physical health of cancer patients, it can be beneficial for people dealing with all kinds of emotional and physical pains.

Scrapbooking is the Best Medicine

Using Your Hands Can Make You Smarter

"It is by having hands that man is the most intelligent of animals."

The philosopher Anaxagoras said "It is by having hands that man is the most intelligent of animals." It is true, that handmade self-expression actually increases brain activity. When you use your hands to create, you stimulate the somatosensory and motor cortex of the brain. The process of stimulating this cortex creates connections between different parts of the brain. Intelligence is believed to be more to do with the number of connections within a brain rather than it's size. Hence, the more you craft and create, the more connections you foster and - you guessed it - the smarter you'll be! Teaching children to craft and create art is an excellent way to boost those brain connections from a young age. Crafting is literally a way to exercise your brain. (One could feasibly consider

crafting a workout, right?)

A Handmade Life is a Meaningful Life

Desire to Create is One of the Deepest Yearnings of the Soul

D.W. Winnicott, a psychoanalyst, pediatrician and creativity expert said "It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living." We agree. A handmade life is a beautiful, happier and healthier life.

"It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living."

Last year, here at Scrapbook.com, we unveiled our new slogan - "Life Handmade". McKane Davis, president of Scrapbook.com, explained the genesis for the new slogan: "Here at Scrapbook.com, we believe deeply, that handmade self-expression makes people happier and healthier, and we're on a mission to spread that message to the world. In the digital age, we think living a handmade life is more important than ever. We exist as a company to inspire beautiful, meaningful, handmade self expression and our logo, slogan, and, frankly everything we do, reflects that commitment".

Crafting Connects us to Friends and Family

Davis continues, "Over the years, my mother has created several scrapbooks for me, my spouse and my children. These books are some of our most precious possessions and we feel connected to her and to each other every time we open them up. These books will stay in our family for generations and will become heirlooms for our children and grandchildren."

In a one-stop-shopping world of convenience, taking the time to make something special, personal and handmade means a great deal. Craft projects, scrapbooks, quilts, handmade cards, handcrafted jewelry, and journals connect us to loved ones in the present, bind us to our past and create heirlooms for future generations. Many of these items will be around long after we are gone. Scrapbooks, for example, become beautiful time capsules for our children, parents or friends in future years.

Crafting is Generous and Selfless

Handmade self-expression is about you. It's about your happiness, your health and your creativity. But it also helps and lifts others. For starters, when we are happier, healthier and less anxious as we create, we are able to be more

generous, patient and kind to others.

Many crafts are outward-reaching, and, often, much of what we create is for others.

Furthermore, many crafts are outward-reaching, and, often, much of what we create is for others. We design hand-made cards to say "Thank you", "Happy Birthday" or "I'm Sorry". We sew quilts for loved ones or newborn babies. We knit caps for our friends and the homeless during the winter. We keep hand-written diaries and creative planners for ourselves, but also for our posterity. And of course, we create scrapbook pages to honor those around us and to share with loved ones for generations to come. We uplift others and connect more deeply through our crafts.

Summary

Not only is handmade self-expression valuable, it's also necessary. In our research and survey we didn't find any information suggesting that perfect or complicated crafting was required. On the contrary, whether it's finger painting, sewing, woodworking, or paper crafting, joy comes in the process of learning, discovery, failure, and success. The opportunity to design and create with friends and family, teach a child a skill you love, or just to work in peaceful solitude, will be better for your relationships, your health and your happiness. It's time to turn off the TV, put down your phone, step away from the computer and create.

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