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**abcd4. How to Tame a Perfectionist Streak**

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Modified March 6, 2008

Source: Eric Sherman, Good Housekeeping, May 1996

See if this sounds familiar: You're highly critical of yourself. You often worry about what others will think. You find it difficult to enjoy any praise that does come your way. If that's a fair description of the person you critique in the mirror each morning, you're a perfectionist.

"A perfectionist habitually thinks that anything short of a perfect performance is completely unacceptable," says Steven J. Handling, Ph.D., a psychologist in Irvine, Calif.

To one degree or another, many of us have perfectionist tendencies or even "pockets" of perfectionism (we're neat freaks at the office but far more relaxed at home). In small doses those tendencies can push us to achieve. But those who spend anxious hours obsessing over details are only making themselves miserable. "By unrealistically expecting themselves to be flawless, they set themselves up for constant disappointment," says Handling.

It's not easy to overcome a perfectionist streak, but according to experts, there are some perfectly simple things you can do to make it easier to live with yourself:

**Tally your successes.**

No matter how small the accomplishment seems, keep track of your achievements even if you have to write them down. According to David Burns, MD, author of "Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy," focussing on the things you do right will help you appreciate your positive attributes.

**Use it and lose it.**

Using your perfectionism to give yourself a little push can be a good thing; what you need to learn is when to stop. Focus on doing your best, but be alert for the moment when your extra effort is no longer making things better. Case in point: At midnight, your annual report was in great shape; but at 3 a.m. all you'd done was fuss with small details and make yourself a wreck.

**Build on your mistakes.**

Since you find imperfection in whatever you do, try to approach the inevitable self-critique as a learning opportunity. What would work better next time?

**Think everyday pride.**

Remember the roast that was so tender? The time saving idea you had at work? The way you

finally got the children's playroom organized? Give yourself a hand. "Satisfaction does not come only from high performance," says Handling. "Small accomplishments can bring surprising pleasure."

**Reality-check your fears.**

You're mortified if the cake you've served your guests is a little dry, but odds are they couldn't care less. "Most people appreciate your efforts, even if they're not perfect," says Harriet Nadel, C.S.W., a psychotherapist practicing in New York City.

**Check out the competition.**

Despite what mother said, sometimes comparing yourself to others isn't such a bad idea. Is your next-door neighbour's house absolutely spotless? Does she never lose her temper? Relax. We're all flawed. You're in good company!

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