

Excitement

What This Emotion Is Telling You

Excitement is usually described as a positive emotion, but positive does not always mean comfortable. It can bring energy, anticipation, motivation and hope while also making your heart race, thoughts speed up and body feel highly activated. For somebody already living with anxiety, depression, emotional distress, trauma or sensory sensitivity, that intensity can sometimes feel surprisingly difficult.

This guide explores excitement as part of the **Causes & Triggers** section. The aim is not to treat excitement as a problem. It is to understand what the emotion may be communicating, what can trigger it, why it can sometimes tip into overwhelm, and how to make room for positive feelings without becoming frightened by them.

Excitement may be telling you: this matters to me, something is changing, I want to move towards this, or there is possibility here.

What is excitement?

Excitement is an activated emotional state associated with anticipation, interest, reward and approach. It can occur before something happens, while it is happening, or even while imagining a future possibility. The body may become more alert because it is preparing for action.

Common physical experiences include a faster heartbeat, butterflies, warmth, restlessness, smiling, increased energy, faster speech, difficulty sitting still or a strong urge to act. These sensations overlap with anxiety because both involve physiological arousal. Context and interpretation help shape how the sensations are experienced.

What might excitement be telling you?

- **Something matters.** Your attention has been captured by something personally meaningful.
- **There is possibility.** You may be sensing opportunity, change, novelty or hope.
- **You want to move towards something.** Excitement often accompanies motivation and approach.
- **You feel connected.** Shared excitement can signal belonging, affection or social engagement.
- **You are learning or growing.** New experiences can produce both curiosity and activation.
- **Your nervous system is highly activated.** Even welcome experiences may require pacing and recovery.

Excitement and depression

When somebody has been depressed or emotionally numb, the return of excitement can feel unfamiliar. A person may notice a spark of interest and immediately distrust it: 'What if it disappears?', 'I shouldn't get my hopes up', or 'What if I am disappointed again?'

Low mood can also make positive anticipation harder. This does not mean the person is ungrateful. Depression can affect motivation, reward processing, energy and the ability to imagine pleasure. Small moments of interest may therefore be worth noticing without demanding that they become a dramatic transformation.

Notice the spark

Something I have felt even slightly interested in: _____
What did I notice in my body? _____
Did I allow the feeling, dismiss it or become worried about it? _____

Excitement and anxiety can feel similar

A racing heart, quick breathing, butterflies, restlessness and fast thoughts can occur in both excitement and anxiety. Sometimes the body activates first and the mind tries to explain the sensation. If you are used to interpreting activation as danger, excitement may be misread as a warning.

A useful question can be: **'Is my body telling me I am in danger, or is it telling me something important is happening?'** This should never dismiss genuine safety concerns; it is simply a way to explore ambiguous arousal.

Positive events can still be triggers

Triggers are not always negative events. A new relationship, holiday, promotion, celebration, moving home, starting therapy, receiving good news, planning a wedding or returning to something you love can all increase emotional intensity.

Positive change may involve uncertainty, decisions, disrupted routines, social expectations, sensory load, financial pressure or fear of loss. The emotional system can therefore hold excitement and stress at the same time.

Excitement after difficult experiences

Trauma, bereavement, repeated disappointment or long periods of instability can make positive feelings complicated. Excitement may be followed by guilt, fear, hypervigilance or a strong need to 'bring yourself back down' before something bad happens. Some people learn not to hope because hope has previously felt dangerous.

When excitement becomes overwhelming

Excitement can become uncomfortable when activation rises faster than your capacity to process it. You may talk rapidly, make too many plans, struggle to sleep, overcommit, spend impulsively, forget basic needs or feel emotionally flooded.

- Slow the pace without shutting the feeling down.
- Write ideas down rather than acting on all of them immediately.
- Protect sleep, food, fluids and medication routines.
- Build recovery time around highly stimulating events.
- Reduce additional sensory or social demand.
- Share the excitement with somebody grounding and trusted.

Neurodivergence and excitement

Autistic and ADHD experiences of excitement can be intense. A special interest, new idea, anticipated event or rewarding task may bring deep focus, rapid speech, movement, impulsive planning or difficulty transitioning away. Excitement can be joyful and regulating, but the intensity may also create fatigue afterwards.

Support may include visual planning, clear transition time, body doubling, sensory regulation, writing ideas down, protecting meals and sleep, or intentionally leaving recovery space after an exciting event. The goal is not to make enthusiasm smaller; it is to make the experience sustainable.

What excitement is not telling you

Excitement is not proof that everything will work out. It is not an instruction to say yes immediately, spend money, abandon boundaries or ignore risk. Emotions provide information; they do not have to make decisions for us.

Excitement plus reflection

What am I excited about? _____
What does this tell me matters to me? _____
What facts do I still need? _____
What would a paced next step look like? _____

When you are frightened of feeling good

Some people notice that joy or excitement is quickly followed by dread. This can happen after loss, trauma, depression or repeated experiences of disappointment. The mind may try to protect you by lowering expectations before life has the chance to do it for you.

Rather than forcing positivity, try allowing a small amount of the good feeling: 'I can enjoy this moment without knowing exactly what happens next.'

A personal reflection

"For a long time, excitement made me nervous. If I started looking forward to something, another part of me would immediately say not to get carried away. I thought I was protecting myself from disappointment. Eventually I realised I was also stopping myself from experiencing things while they were good. I am learning that I can feel excited and still stay grounded. I do not need a guarantee before I let myself enjoy a possibility." - illustrative personal reflection

Excitement, impulsivity and pacing

Strong positive emotion can increase the urge to act quickly. Before making a significant commitment, purchase, relationship decision or major change, it can help to create a pause. A pause is not the same as suppressing enthusiasm; it gives excitement somewhere safe to settle while judgement catches up.

- Sleep on major decisions where possible.

- Write down the idea and return to it later.
- Ask: 'Will I still want this when the intensity is lower?'
- Check cost, time, energy and practical consequences.
- Keep one trusted person involved if excitement can make pacing difficult.

An important clinical distinction

Ordinary excitement can temporarily increase energy and reduce tiredness. However, a sustained or marked change involving unusually elevated or irritable mood, very little need for sleep, racing thoughts, pressured speech, increased goal-directed activity, risky behaviour, impulsive spending or behaviour that is significantly out of character deserves professional assessment.

These experiences can have different causes and should not be self-diagnosed from a checklist. If you or someone close to you is concerned about a substantial change in mood or behaviour, speak with a GP or mental-health professional. Seek urgent help where there is immediate risk.

Making space for excitement

Self-care is not only about reducing difficult emotions. It also includes learning how to receive positive ones. You may need to practise noticing pleasure, anticipation and interest without immediately analysing them away.

Let the feeling exist

Today I am looking forward to: _____
 The feeling in my body is: _____
 I can stay grounded by: _____
 I give myself permission to enjoy: _____

Questions for reflection

- What tends to excite me?
- Do I allow myself to show enthusiasm?
- What happens in my thoughts when I begin to hope?
- Do I confuse activation with danger?
- Do I become overcommitted when I am excited?
- What helps me enjoy positive emotion without losing my balance?
- Which parts of my life currently create curiosity, possibility or connection?

Supporting someone who is excited and overwhelmed

Avoid immediately telling them to calm down. Their excitement may be meaningful and welcome. Instead, help them contain the intensity without shaming it.

- Join their enthusiasm before moving to practical questions.
- Ask whether they want you to listen, celebrate, plan or help them slow the pace.
- Support ordinary routines such as meals, sleep and medication.
- Help separate ideas that need action now from ideas that can wait.
- Take concerning, sustained or markedly out-of-character mood changes seriously.

A seven-day excitement awareness exercise

- Day 1 - Notice one moment of interest or anticipation.
- Day 2 - Identify where excitement appears in your body.
- Day 3 - Notice whether your mind labels the sensations as positive, dangerous or both.
- Day 4 - Enjoy one small positive experience without turning it into a task.
- Day 5 - Practise pacing one exciting idea rather than acting immediately.
- Day 6 - Share something you are looking forward to with a safe person.

- Day 7 - Reflect on what excitement has been telling you about your needs, values and hopes.

Books and further exploration

- *Atlas of the Heart* - Brene Brown.
- *Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?* - Dr Julie Smith.
- *The Happiness Trap* - Russ Harris.
- *Burnout* - Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski.

Clinical and source notes

This resource is informed by general psychological understanding of emotion, arousal, anticipation and approach motivation, alongside public mental-health information from the NHS and Mind. The section distinguishing ordinary excitement from potentially clinically significant mood elevation reflects the importance of professional assessment where there is a sustained, marked or out-of-character change in mood, sleep, activity or risk-taking.

This is an educational resource, not a diagnostic tool. Physical symptoms such as persistent palpitations, chest pain, fainting or significant breathlessness should receive appropriate medical assessment rather than being assumed to be emotional.

What this emotion is telling you

Excitement can be a message from the part of you that still notices possibility. It can tell you what you care about, what you are drawn towards, where hope is beginning to return and where life feels meaningful.

You do not have to turn every spark into a plan. You do not have to guarantee the outcome. Sometimes the healthiest response is simply to notice: **'I am excited. This matters to me.'**

Space to Breathe Therapy - Understanding emotions without judging them.