

Happiness Leads to Better Health

Happiness is an emotion associated with feelings ranging from easiness and satisfaction to bliss and strong joyfulness. Philosophers and religious thinkers have often defined happiness in terms of living a good life, or flourishing, rather than simply as an emotion.

Happiness is good for individuals and society. Happy people are more productive, learn more and are more creative. Happy people are also more successful, have better relationships, are healthier and live longer.

Research findings

- **Sources of happiness.** Research shows that about half of our happiness is genetic, while the individual controls the rest. Researchers analyzed studies on identical twins and concluded that happiness is 50% genetic, 40% intentional (results of actions you deliberately take to become happier), and 10% is circumstantial (where you live, your health, your work, your marriage, your income, etc.)
- **Happiness comes first, success follows.** If you love what you are doing, you will be successful. Happy people are known to seek out and undertake new goals in life. They are generally successful in relationships and work.
- **Happiness and satisfaction lead to better health.** Studies show that people who are happy and satisfied with their lives are usually healthier than people who are not happy.
- **Sense of humor.** Laughing, good humor and smiling not only lightens your mood but also relieves stress, increases your energy and takes away thoughts of anger, anxiety or distress.
- **Money will not make you happy.** Studies show that money will not buy happiness. Psychological studies do not link wealth with greater feeling of happiness and satisfaction with life.

What makes us happy?

Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California, Riverside has identified eight behaviors that happy, mentally healthy people do:

1. **Count your blessings.** Remember good things in your life.
2. **Practice acts of kindness.** Kindness really does make you happy.
3. **Thank a mentor.** Say “thank you” to people who help you.
4. **Take time for your friends and family.** Where you live, how much money you make, your job title and even your health have surprisingly small effects on your satisfaction with life. The biggest factor appears to be strong personal relationships.
5. **Learn to forgive.** Forgive people who hurt you. If you do not, you carry the problem.
6. **Take care of your health and your body.** A healthy body gives you a happy mind. Getting plenty of sleep, exercising, smiling and laughing can all enhance your mood.
7. **Notice good things as they happen.** Think about good events every day.
8. **Practice positive thinking.** Learn to work with your problems and your stress.

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References and Resources

Cholesterol: Should you worry about your child's levels?
Fact Sheets for Families, online at
www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org

Overweight and Obesity. Fact Sheets for Families, online at
www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) at www.aap.org



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