

What is happiness and why is it important?



Happiness-“is a mental or emotional state of well-being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy”

Three questions to ask yourself: How do you feel right now? What is your satisfaction with life in relation to your personal goals and aspirations? Are there areas in your life that you have increased happiness compared to others?

How you answer these questions gages your level of happiness. There are no wrong answers. “The key is that the person himself/herself is making the evaluation of life- not experts, philosophers, or others. Thus, the person herself or himself is the expert here: Is my life going well, according to the standards that I choose to use.”- Ed Diener.

Increased happiness can influence all aspects of one’s life including:

- Better physical health: faster healing, fewer doctors’ visits
- Longer life
- Increased creativity
- Success at work/education
- High quality relationships: happier marriages, friendships
- Greater resilience and use of coping skills

It is normal to not feel happy all the time. In fact sadness, anger and other emotions play important roles in our daily function as well. Science tells us that about 50% of our happiness level is genetic, meaning we have no control of it. Another 10% is based on circumstances such as age, sex, race, financial etc. Lastly you have 40% left that you can impact with various activities. It is important not to strive for perfection with happiness but a manageable balance.

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved”- Helen Keller

Ideas to try to increase happiness in one’s life:

Express gratitude- This can be as simple as writing down three things that went well today, or three things you are grateful for. Nothing is too small to be grateful for. Examples: Sunshine, a pet, friends etc.

Random acts of kindness- Do something nice for someone. Performing acts of kindness for others will promote positive self-image, strengthen relationships with others, and make you feel good. Some ideas to get you started: giving a complement, donating your time to a friend/neighbor/family or an organization, giving a small gift or donation to someone who doesn't expect it. Also don't forget that this is not limited to just people, animals and the environment enjoy kindness as well.

Savor the moment- Look around your environment and look for the things you don't necessarily notice in your daily activities. Listen for the birds singing, the view out your window, how your tea or coffee taste. Try to incorporate all of your senses. Doing this slows down our thinking and helps increase focus and awareness. This also helps give our minds a break from anything that maybe causing discomfort or unhappiness.

Self-Care- Participate in activities that promote physical and emotional well-being such as: getting enough rest/sleep, eating healthy foods and getting enough to drink, socializing with others, having hobbies you enjoy for all seasons, exercise etc.

Examine your coping strategies- Take an inventory of the coping skills that you may have used in the past to deal with anger, sadness, loss of someone, stress etc. Did you resort to using negative or positive coping strategies? Depending on your choice may impact your happiness. Think about trying a few of these coping skills, humor, acceptance, supports (church, family, friends, and therapist), journaling, and distraction.

Try to remember that nothing changes overnight, including emotions. Trying one or more of these tips may help after doing them for a period of time. Do what works for you, there isn't a one size fits all for happiness. Also keep it fresh by varying the activities you participate in so that it doesn't become boring. Also don't feel pressured to do it every day, you may get a greater benefit by doing these things a couple times per week.