

Secrets To Finding Happiness

Contrary to the belief that happiness is hard to explain, or that it depends on having great wealth, researchers have identified the core factors in a happy life. The primary components are number of friends, closeness of friends, closeness of family, and relationships with coworkers and neighbors. Together, these features explain about 70 percent of personal happiness.

"Studies also have shown that one of the best predictors of happiness is whether a person considers his or her life to have a purpose," says David Niven, Ph.D., author of *The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People*. "Without a clearly defined purpose that people come up with themselves, they're likely to feel unsatisfied with their lives." After analyzing thousands of studies, Dr. Niven offers the following research-based secrets of happy people.

Steps to take

- Cultivate friendships. Rekindle past relationships and take advantage of opportunities at work or among your neighbors to expand your friendship base. "People need to feel they're part of something bigger, that they care about others and are cared about by others in return," says Dr. Niven.
- Accentuate the positive. Happy people and unhappy people explain the world differently. When an unhappy person must interpret the world, eight of ten times he or she will see the negative in an event. When a happy person does so, eight of ten times he or she will see the positive.
- Don't confuse stuff with success. You're neither a better nor a worse person because of the kind of car you drive, the size of your home or the job you have. In one study, the availability of material resources was nine times less important to happiness than the availability of "personal" resources, such as friends and family.
- Volunteer. Volumes of research show a strong consensus that volunteering contributes to happiness by creating an increased sense of purpose in people's lives. Volunteers, on average, are twice as likely to feel happy with their lives as people who don't volunteer.
- Share of yourself. Don't hold your feelings, thoughts and hopes inside. Share them with your friends and family. People who hold things inside tend to feel isolated and think no one understands them. "Those who share feel supported and more content, even if events don't go exactly as they wish," Dr. Niven says.
- Enjoy what you have. Satisfied people appreciate what they have in life and don't compare themselves to others. Valuing what you have over what you don't or can't have leads to greater happiness.
- Cherish animals. Interaction with animals provides both immediate joy and long-term positive feelings and contributes strongly to our happiness. "Animals have so much to teach us about love," says Dr. Niven. "The closer we get to animals, the more joy they give us."
- Don't face your problems alone. "Problems can appear to be unsolvable," he says. "But we're social creatures who need to discuss our problems with others, whether it be those who care about us most or those who have faced the same ones we have. When we're alone, problems fester. By asking for help, we can gain perspective and find solutions."

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About Perspectives...

We are a private outpatient group practice offering individual, couple, family & group counseling services. Our goal is to provide clients with affordable treatment in a sensitive and understanding manner, tailoring the treatment to their individualized needs.

Our counselors have been providing services since 1981 and are committed to providing clients with the highest quality personalized treatment services possible. Experienced and caring clinicians will work with you to determine the nature of your problems and develop a treatment plan to assist you in their resolution.

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How To Catch The Happiness Habit

Everyone gets the blues occasionally, but people who can extricate themselves from a bad mood may have discovered the secret to happiness.

"The secret to having a happy life isn't to be constantly laughing, but to be able to bounce back from a bout with unhappiness, to use little tricks -- some happy habits -- to jump-start your mind and revitalize your energy," says Bix Bender, author of "7 Habits of Highly Happy People."

Mr. Bender gathered the following strategies on how to beat the blues from friends, neighbors and strangers. One or two of these happy habits may help lift your spirits the next time you're feeling down.

Get that 'good tired' feeling

"When you exercise, you're doing something for yourself -- your body, mind and spirit," Mr. Bender says. "After a day of strenuous activity, such as cleaning house or gardening, you're probably tired -- but it's a good tired. This feeling has to do with the fact you did something that needed doing, but it also means your mind and body worked together in a pleasing way."

Try a little comfort food

Satisfying your cravings in a healthful way can comfort a wounded spirit. Try these recipes for happiness:

Make some homemade bread. Pound and knead the dough as though it were all your problems. Eat a couple of slices while the bread is still warm from the oven.

Or prepare yourself for a tough day by getting up early enough to have a long, leisurely and filling breakfast. This small pleasure can help you keep your head up in the hours ahead.

Or call some friends and invite them to dinner. You'll be too busy preparing the meal to stay depressed.

Do something you like

You may be able to jump-start happiness by doing something for yourself that makes you smile. To make your day happier:

Write down the words to an inspirational song or poem and tape the piece of paper where you'll see it every day. Use it to remind yourself of how you want to live your life.

Go to a sporting event--the cheering will boost your mood.

Turn up your car stereo and sing along at the top of your lungs.

Draw a beautiful, peaceful, happy scene.

Spend time in nature

"The great outdoors can soothe the spirit and inspire happiness," Mr. Bender says.

To learn from nature:

Have a special wild spot -- a lake, park or forest where you can go for restoration.

Grow something. It doesn't matter if you tend to a whole garden, a tree or a bean in a paper cup.

Walk barefoot in the grass or on the beach.

Spread happiness

Doing things for others helps you get your mind off your troubles. To spread the happiness habit around:

Do something to make someone smile.

Do a favor for someone without being asked.

Enjoy the little things

"A person doesn't become happy in big gushes and explosions," Mr. Bender says. "Someone who feels good about life builds happiness one little moment at a time, one decision at a time, one smile at a time." To acknowledge life's small pleasures:

Think about those you love and those who love you.

Spend time with positive people.

Find happiness in little things -- smelling freshly cut grass, making it to the gas station before your car runs out of gas, saying hello to a stranger and having the person smile back.

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