



## What Makes People Happy?

Would winning the lottery make you happy? Not likely. According to David G. Myers, a happiness researcher, money does not buy happiness. Rich people are no more happy than people with average incomes. In addition, older people are neither less nor more happy than young people. And men have no advantage over women. So who is happy?

Only about 10-15 percent Americans identify themselves as truly happy. Certain personality traits, such as extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, are related to happiness. However, in the right situation, anyone can be happy.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has observed that people are most satisfied with life when their work and leisure life provide them opportunity to use their skills. Somewhere between the anxiety of being overwhelmed and the apathy of being bored is the ideal mix called "flow." Happy people have more flow. They are appropriately challenged in ways that allow them to personally contribute.

Happiness has also been linked to meaningful relationships. Individuals who are happy are supported by close relationships with family members, friends, and fellow employees. Such relationships help fulfill our need to belong to something bigger than ourselves. The network of friends and family also provides us with opportunities to help or be helped. If we are to maintain a healthy balance in life, we will eventually need help from others. Perhaps this partly explains the finding that married individuals, both male and female, are on average happier than single individuals.

Finally, happy people are more likely to be involved in a faith community. A Gallup survey found people who responded with the highest scores on spiritual commitment were twice as likely to declare they were very happy. Other research has suggested those with deep religious faith are less vulnerable to depression and more resilient during times of crisis. Meyers notes that religion is usually practiced communally, involving "the fellowship of kindred spirits," and "the bearing of one another's burdens."

So, if happiness is your goal, forget the lottery tickets. Instead, take a friend to lunch. Help a fellow worker. Set your sights on a challenge and enjoy the experience. Look to your network of friends and family. Use your skills to make a difference at home and at work.

## Applications:

To strengthen your personal happiness and add to the joyfulness of you family experience try some of the following:

1. **Work on something challenging.** Hard work can be fulfilling when we can see and believe in the purpose of the task. What challenging task can you take on?
2. **Do something for others.** Service helps to connect us with others. It shows we care for others and helps them care for us. Service builds relationships. How can you serve?
3. **Smile often.** It has been said that if you smile, the world smiles with you. Having a cheerful disposition can dramatically influence how people interact with us. When we are happy, we draw people to us and develop a greater support system. Even a brief exchange of smiles connects us momentarily to others. So make a point to smile.
4. **Join a group.** Participating in a club, a church group, or community group can create many opportunities. It can broaden your network of relationships, provide opportunities for service, and provide a meaningful cause or purpose to which you can contribute your skills. Would you benefit from joining a group or increasing your participation in a group to which you already belong?
5. **Give someone a break.** Recognize that sometimes things won't be done to your pleasing. You may be cut off by an unthinking driver. Or someone may have forgotten your special day. Provide helpful feedback if needed, but don't be disagreeable. Don't harbor ill feelings. Don't process it over and over again. Forgive, forget, and move on. Can you give someone a break?

## References for Additional Information:

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