

Happiness: Something to Talk About

Happiness is the whole aim and end of human existence
– Aristotle

There are many ways to think about happiness. For some of us, happiness is about having cool stuff and doing interesting and different things. For others, happiness is equated with emotions of joy, contentment, or enthusiasm. Some of us find that happiness is a spiritual experience – a sense of connectedness and belonging to the Universe. And there are those of us who wonder “What is true happiness?” and “How do I cultivate it?” No matter how you look at it, happiness comes from the experience that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile. We can all identify individuals who appear to have a talent for happiness, to see the world around them through rose-colored glasses, to make out the silver lining even in misfortune, to live in the present, and to find joy in the little things from day to day.

Happiness plays an important role in your well being. So what makes us happy? Objective life circumstances (am I living the good life?) account for only 8-15% of happiness ratings according to Lyubomirsky. Maybe you’d be happier if you won the lottery? An interesting study done by Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman suggests otherwise. The researchers studied both lottery winners and persons who sustained a physical injury to see if winning the lottery made you happier or if sustaining an injury made you less happy. What they found was that immediately after either event, levels of happiness were higher (lottery winners), or lower (physically injured), and that after eight weeks or less, people returned to the level of happiness they had before the event. This research suggests that we adapt to these situations very quickly, and often return to the degree of happiness we had before such an event.

Brickman and Campbell argue that all people labor on a “hedonic treadmill.” As we rise in accomplishments and possessions, our expectations also rise. Soon we get used to the new level and it no longer makes us happy. Has this ever happened to you? Maybe when you bought a new car? Only to find out that what you really

wanted was the feeling the car would bring you, not the car itself? These are just a few of the difficulties in understanding what we mean by happiness.

Research continues to explore whether happiness is primarily an internal state or external circumstance, or both.

How do we go about increasing our happiness?

Research suggests the following strategies:

- View yourself positively
- When confronted with stressful life events, react to them in positive ways
- Pursue goals that provide intrinsic joy, such as goals that include some sort of community contribution, emotional intimacy, or personal growth
- Expect favorable life circumstances in the future
- Possess confidence in your skills and abilities
- Develop deep friendships
- Love others – your family, friends, those in need, etc.
- Maintain a healthy balance of work, relationships, recreation and spirituality
- Shift your mental perspective and cultivate feelings of compassion and kindness to others

Enjoy the journey!

Happiness, that grand mistress of the ceremonies in the dance of life, impels us through all its mazes and meanderings, but leads none of us by the same route –
Charles Colton

Dr. Eric Nicely

Psychologist (Lic. PSY 18892)
220 Montgomery Street
Suite 1019
San Francisco, CA 94104

Phone:
(415) 955-1975

E-Mail:
solutions@drnicely.com