

WHAT INFLUENCES OUR HAPPINESS?

50% is genetic disposition – we are wired positive or negative. **40% is intentional activity** – we can change our attitude and develop happiness. **10% is life's circumstances.**

Genes put you at a set point, but most people let life's circumstances influence them more than intentional activity, which has a greater impact.

Chasing after money and things will make you frustrated because once you achieve it you want more, like lottery winners for instance. Invest in experiences and memories for happiness.

Resilience is important. How fast you recover from adverse events will contribute to your ability to manage stress. Resilience is like a muscle. The more you practice it, the stronger it gets. Anticipate a challenge. Recognize emotional amplifiers, i.e., what triggers you. Use the resources that you have – past experiences and social support, for example. Practice skills like strategy games to help your brain increase its ability to solve problems.

Don't sweat the small stuff. Shift your attention to the positive instead of obsessing about the situation – acceptance instead of resistance or blame.

Adjust your outlook, or view on life. Are you an optimist who tends to see the good in a situation or a Debbie Downer who interprets good news in a negative way, e.g., "I won the lottery but now I have to pay all these taxes"?

Happy people identify negative thoughts and judgments and

consciously intervene to reframe them in a positive or neutral way. Unhappy people continue to dwell on the negative thoughts. You want to focus on how to recover from setbacks. Overcome the tendency to ruminate or resist. To acquire optimism, practice the habit of optimistic thinking. **View the glass as half full.** See what else is positive in your life and remember empowering times. **Focus on your successes.**

Or distract yourself by refocusing your attention on something positive, whether it's music, a book, or a happy memory. Doing this will provide the brain with a different activity. If the brain isn't sufficiently stimulated, it will try to relieve boredom by worrying and you need to get the brain to think about something else.

Happy people manage stress well. They view problems as predictable, temporary and manageable. Practice **proactive thinking** to develop the courage to create change and the patience to make incremental progress.

Every time you encounter a stressor, **STOP** and evaluate if you have some control over it. When you feel a problem can be solved, it is no longer a stressor. But you don't actually have to be in control. You just have to feel as if you have control. Ask yourself, what can I do about the stress? If you don't have control, acknowledge it and accept it. Don't resist it. Happy people are less stressed and less stressed people are happier.

Be more expressive in your emotions. **Gratitude** has a major impact on happiness. Each day

write down three things that make you happy. Have **compassion** for others and show and tell people you care about them. **And accept your limitations.** Happy people tame their "inner critic." Perfectionists tend to be unhappy because they hold themselves to an unattainable standard.

Acting happy makes you feel happy, so manipulate your emotions. See the humor in everyday life and find an excuse to **laugh!**

Other habits to apply to your life for increased happiness include regular physical activity, which also helps you to sleep better, and the practice of **mindfulness**, or moment to moment awareness without judgment. Take time to lose track of time.

Be happy in the NOW.

Practical Tips for Mindfulness

- Take a couple of minutes to notice your breathing. Sense the flow of the breath, the rise and fall of your belly.
- Notice what you are doing as you are doing it and tune into your senses. For example, when you are eating, notice the color, texture and taste of the food.
- Don't feel that you need to fill up all your time with doing. Take some time to simply be.
- Recognize that thoughts are simply thoughts; you don't need to believe them or react to them.
- Practice listening without making judgments.
- Notice where you tend to zone out (e.g., driving, texting, web surfing, doing dishes, brushing teeth, etc.). Practice bringing more awareness to that activity.
- Spend time in nature.