



PHILOSOPHY

Simple Ways To Find True Happiness

Bill Reddy, LAc, Dipl. Ac.

Patients in our clinics are always seeking happiness. As their health advocate, we need to ensure we inform them that in order to find happiness, they have to make sure to identify what makes them happy in the first place. When I present this material to the public, I ask an audience to write down two to three things that bring them joy. I then ask them to write down next to each item how much time they spent doing those activities in the past week. The key is to identify what brings you true happiness and then carve time out in your schedule to do it. The same goes for us as practitioners, often we neglect our self care and happiness and need to be reminded of it.

Behavioral/Lifestyle Recommendations

In today's world, it is hard to get away from the ongoing flow in information. Whether it be at home on our televisions or on the road on the radio and on our mobile phones - all of the time. One of the first ways to begin the path toward happiness is to remember not to be a media addict.

While for some, the morning newspaper or evening news program is a source of pleasure, for others, it may increase stress. A patient of mine who works as an editor for a major news source said, "If it bleeds, it leads." A casual glance at any current headlines would prove her maxim. It's a shame that in a country of 300+ million law abiding citizens (containing a small percentage of those who are mentally ill or criminals) that our media chooses to devote a substantial amount of their airtime and print space to report the behavior of few bad eggs, violent weather, and dirty politicians. I canceled my newspaper subscription two years ago and don't watch the news and can honestly say the quality of my life has improved. Studies in stress management substantiate that watching the news does, in fact, create more stress even if the test subjects state that they "relax and watch TV...". Television can create fear, increase rampant consumerism, and make us unhappy with what we currently have. Researchers Leo Jeffres and Jean Dobes found watching TV can reduce our life satisfaction by up to 50 percent. Furthermore, excessive TV watching triples our hunger for possessions and reduces our personal contentment by 5 percent for every hour per day we watch.



Show appreciation. Think of someone influential in your life; perhaps someone who was there exactly when you needed them, who provided you guidance and support. Put pen to paper and write them a note of gratitude. Do things for others. The happiest people surveyed in a number of studies are those who routinely do things for others such as volunteer for a local soup kitchen. We have chosen exceptional fields where we serve our communities every day, but we can still do more. In our species' early days, the key to survival was cooperation in the small, tightly-knit communities of hunter gatherers. When we assist others, the very act of helping brings us back to who we really are, and a sense of satisfaction and happiness is a direct result.

Studies of geriatrics in assisted living community environments were shown to live longer when they have a small animal or even a plant to take care of, and report a greater life satisfaction than those who don't have anyone or anything (plant or animal) depending on them. You may also consider committing five random acts of kindness per week. This could be as simple as smiling at someone who's looking depressed at the supermarket, helping someone struggling with lifting a heavy box into their trunk at a hardware store parking lot, or mowing your neighbor's lawn while they're out of town. If you wish to take a bit more time you could volunteer for an organization like Habitat for Humanity, read to children at a local hospital, or teach *Tai Qi* at an assisted living facility. Anything you do for your community will lift your spirits.

The Physical and Mental Aspects

In order to achieve peace of mind, we also need to focus on the physical aspects like the maintenance of our bodies. In order to achieve happiness, it is critical to exercise. Regular exercise not only tames high cortisol levels, but also has been shown to be as effective as antidepressant medication for those suffering from mild to moderate depression. Our bodies were designed to move. The majority of American adults lead sedentary lives and they can easily slip into mild depression. Start your patient out walking two blocks a day around their neighborhood slowly working their way up to 1-3 miles per day. A nice walk clears the head, increases circulation to all

the organs, increases intestinal motility and boosts vitamin D production if it's sunny.

Breathe. Those of you who practice meditation, *qigong*, *tai qi*, yoga or any other mind-body self cultivation know the power of proper breathing. When you find yourself in a stressful situation, slow down your breathing.

Focus on the Positive, Always

It is always a good idea to identify your strengths. Find where your weaknesses are and work within the framework of your strengths. People find much more meaning in their lives when they're working within their strengths. For instance, an introvert may not enjoy being a social worker, but may love to be an editor.

Spend time with your friends. Socializing and interacting with others is a key trait of happy people. They spend more time nurturing relationships and have more friends and associates than unhappy people. Friends of mine refer to me as the "hub" of a wheel, where the spokes are people. They say that I bring people together (for live music, dinner parties, plays, festivals, etc.) Make any excuse to create a sense of community and belonging and surround yourself with like-minded people.

Learn to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts. As I continue to learn and practice positive psychology, I've become more aware of negative thoughts when they arise. If there's anything on your mind that makes you feel "bad" (angry, scared, concerned, anxious, depressed...), actively replace it with something that feels better.

And most importantly, make sure to get enough rest/sleep. It's hard to be happy when you're exhausted and barely firing on four cylinders. Everyone is aware of getting "eight hours of sleep" for good health, but recent research suggests an average closer to nine hours per night for optimal cognitive function. The key is to always remember - Don't worry, be happy.

NOVEMBER 2014