

FINDING *HAPPINESS* IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

In the current environment of doom, gloom, and uncertainty, does happiness stand a chance? Can we possibly be happy at a time like this? Or better yet, can we possibly learn to be happy right now, despite all the loss, anticipatory grief, anxiety, unpredictability, fear, and frustration that's going around?



We can.

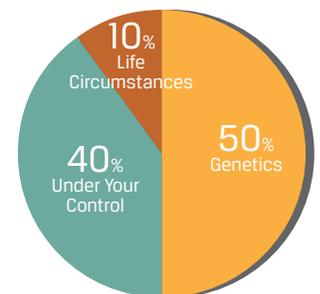
We can because we can learn to make ourselves happy. We can learn because happiness is not the result of the external environment, but rather the result of our own internal environment. Happiness is a choice. Unhappiness is a habit, and we can make the choice to break that habit every minute of the day in what we do and how we think.

There are several myths surrounding happiness that makes people believe that the next promotion, the next salary hike, the next big car, the next exciting vacation, the perfect romantic relationship, or winning the lottery will make them happy. Or that some people are just born happier than others.

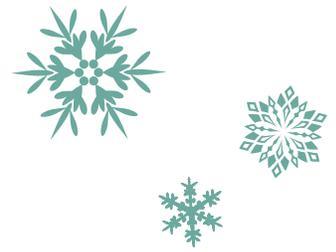
According to Sonja Lyubomirsky, a positive psychology researcher, 50% of our happiness level is determined by genetic factors, only 10% is determined by life's circumstances, and a whopping 40% is what we have complete control over. This is good news!

So, what we do with this 40% can be a game changer for our happiness, which Lyubomirsky defines as the experience of joy, contentment, or positive wellbeing combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.

You create your own unhappiness by the way you think about your life and your world. In the words of the Dalai Lama, "*Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions.*" The secret to happiness and fulfilment does not lie in the things you have, but in the way you think about things. Becoming aware of your own thoughts, understanding their dysfunctionality in your life, and replacing them with happier thoughts holds the key. So, what are some of the possible shifts in thinking that we need to bring about?



8 TIPS FOR FINDING HAPPINESS



Be grateful and focus on positivity. Bring into focus what you have and what is good rather than what you don't have and what is not good. It is surprising how what people focus on takes on a life of its own. So, you can maintain a gratitude journal, count your blessings, express sincere thanks, and learn to recognize and acknowledge the positives that come out from every challenge you've faced in the past.

Let go of negativity. Forgiving those who have hurt you in the past allows you to move on with your life, untethered and free. Embracing failure and learning from it allows you to grow toward your potential and opens you up to the possibility of success in the future. Let go of the need to please others. Don't sweat the small stuff, and let go of the need for perfectionism and control. Remember that there will always be things you cannot control. In fact, the only things that you can control are your thoughts, your behaviors, how you interpret things that are happening outside of you, and how much you allow them to affect you.

Remember that this, too, shall pass. Expect everything to eventually come to an end and give way to something different. Nothing is permanent and lasts forever—not the ups, and not the downs. If you are on a high, knowing that the high will end keeps you grounded. If you are on a low, knowing that the low will eventually end keeps you hopeful.

Take care of yourself. Exercise, nutrition, and sleep help take care of your body, which is extremely important. But taking care of your spirit is also important to remember. Practicing nonjudgmental awareness and acceptance of the person you are; smiling, laughing, and having fun; cutting out the comparisons; simplifying your wants and decluttering your space; reconnecting with nature; listening to music; visualizing happiness; learning something new, taking a class, being creative, or pursuing a hobby; meditating, journeying inwards with honesty; and discovering new meaning in and about yourself and the world all help nourish and nurture your spirit.

Live in the moment. The past is over; there is nothing you can do to change it. The future isn't here yet, and no one can say with certainty what it holds. So, just savor the present because that is all there is right now. Try to enjoy the lunch you are fortunate to have without panicking about the meeting after. Enjoy the smooth flow of warm water over your body while in the bath instead of ruminating over the argument with the neighbor last week. Enjoy the game of Monopoly with your child instead of checking your email while playing. Stop and smell the roses.

Nurture human connections. The current pandemic has thrown up several challenges for meeting people; however, human connections can still be sustained by reaching out in many ways. Physical contact and closeness are not the only way. We are blessed with technology that has allowed everyone to be able to connect freely. Are you using the technology to connect by reaching out, or are you using it to isolate further by staying in your cocoon and binge-watching shows? That is a choice everyone makes. No man is an island. Everyone needs a community; everyone needs to feel the warmth and love of connection.

Make your life meaningful to others. Shift the focus away from yourself. Are you able to give happiness to others? There are so many people in distress right now for different reasons. Can you volunteer your time and resources to bring them some relief or joy, or even just a smile? Can you look for opportunities to practice kindness every day?

Asking for help is a sign of strength. There is a common perception that people need to deal with life's struggles and challenges on their own. If they don't, they will be perceived to be weak. However, asking for help is one of the most difficult things to do and requires immense courage. So, if it is indeed that difficult, then being able to do it has to be a sign of great strength.

At first glance, this pursuit of happiness seems like a lofty goal, but it really isn't. You need to break it down into smaller goals that you can work on, maybe one at a time. Achieve them, reward yourself for achieving them, remember to feel happy about achieving them, and then move on to the next. Finally, in that journey toward making happiness a choice, if you find pebbles or boulders blocking your path, remember that you can always reach out for help.