

Chapter 2 - The Science of Happiness

What Our Body Needs to Be Happy

Happiness is not just an emotional state. The condition of your body also affects your levels of happiness. It's hard to feel your best if you are running on three hours of sleep and a soda for breakfast. To keep your body in balance and achieve the greatest levels of happiness, you have to focus on basic self-care:

- ✦ Sleep: Most people require about eight hours of sleep to fully recharge. Your body needs this time to rest, organize your thoughts from the day, and heal. If you are regularly deprived of sleep, you will be more likely to feel irritable, make mistakes, or have difficulty making decisions.

- ✦ A Balanced Diet: Your body is an intricate machine, requiring a delicate balance of vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and water to function correctly. The average recommended diet for an adult consists of lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, beans, nuts, and at least eight cups of water every day. Without proper nutrition, your body will experience a host of unpleasant symptoms.

- ✦ Exercise: Your body requires activity to keep everything running and in good working condition. There is nothing magical about working out on a treadmill or in the gym: any sort of activity will do. Maybe

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you enjoy walking the dog, playing volley ball, or dancing. Find an activity or two you enjoy and try to engage in it at least four to five times each week.

- ✦ Comfort: A lot of people forget about this one, but honestly it can be hard to feel happy in the moment if you are wearing an itchy sweater in a hot room with the sides of a metal chair digging into your hips. Be mindful of your body and what it needs to feel satisfied. Try to pay attention to the little aches and pains and soothe yourself by dressing comfortably and adjusting your posture as needed.

The Biology of Happiness

Genetics play a role in your baseline level of happiness. The truth is, some people are just born a little happier than others. However, don't let this discourage you, because genetics are not the whole picture. Happiness is also about the choices you make and your views on the world.

The main chemical associated with happiness is serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter, or a messenger, which tells your body how to respond and feel. Serotonin helps to regulate your mood, sleep, and digestion. People who report higher levels of happiness tend to have higher levels of serotonin. In fact, many people who have clinical depression may choose to take anti-depressants, which can give a boost to their naturally low levels of serotonin.

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Another neurotransmitter is melatonin, which affects your energy levels and your sleep cycles. If you are getting approximately eight hours of sleep each night, you will wake up feeling more refreshed and ready to take on your day. If you are having difficulties sleeping, you could have abnormal levels of melatonin.

Oxytocin is the neurotransmitter that helps you feel connected and loved by others. When someone you love touches you or gives you a hug, your oxytocin levels will rise. However, something as small as a negative thought can decrease your levels of oxytocin.

Dopamine is the neurotransmitter than can help us feel happy when we accomplish our goals and it can drive us to keep pursuing them. Higher levels of dopamine cause us to feel more positive, excited, and eager to learn, grow, and receive rewards for our work.

Endorphins are another chemical that functions like a neurotransmitter. When we exercise, fall in love, or have an orgasm, our body releases endorphins, which cause an overall sense of well-being. Endorphins are also released after experiences of pain, such as eating spicy foods, to help our body calm down.

Happiness, at least from a biological standpoint, is a cocktail of chemicals telling our brains and our bodies how to respond to the world around us. While your genetics are out of your control, you can certainly pay attention

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to the activities that cause you to feel happier and pursue them, causing spikes in those pleasure-producing chemicals.

Fight vs. Flight Syndrome

If you were taking a hike through the mountains and happened upon a bear, standing up on its hind legs and roaring, you would probably be scared for your life. Your heart would start racing, you would sweat, and your muscles would tense up, ready to spring into action to either fight the bear or flee from it as fast as possible. That is fight versus flight – the idea that if you were presented with a life-threatening situation, you would either fight or run. Either way, your body responds by revving up your engines and getting you ready for action.

Your body responds the same way to emotional threats. Whether your spouse walked out and slammed the door after an argument or your boss is berating you for a mistake you made, your blood pressure will increase, your heart rate will increase, and your muscles will tense up just as if you were facing a bear.

When the emotional threat has passed, your body tries to find a way to calm down, again, often leaving you feeling absolutely exhausted. In order to achieve happiness, you have to reduce anger and anxiety in your life. It's impossible to enjoy being happy if your body is revved up and ready to fight all the time.

Chapter 3 - Is Happiness Possible?

How Can You Be Happy with So Much to Worry About?

Worry. Fear. Anxiety. Stress. It goes by a lot of names, but at the end of the day, it's the same thing: that gnawing feeling, those repetitive thoughts that cause your stomach to turn and lines to draw across your face. That feeling that causes your muscles to tense up and your heart too race so much that you are left feeling worn out and no matter how much you want to sleep, you still find yourself making a checklist for the next day.

Let's be honest: there are so many things to worry about. You could spend hours, if not your whole day, wondering why your sister in law didn't call you back or what that text message was that your husband got when he walked out of the room. You could waste your time worrying about why your son is late for curfew, what your coworker might be saying behind your back, or what rare diseases could be accounting for your muscle aches and fatigue. *Or you could be happy.*

Freedom from worry comes when you realize that worrying won't change anything. Let that sink in for a minute. The hours, days, and years you have spent worrying haven't fixed a thing. Think about it. What does worry really accomplish?

Here's an exercise for getting over worry: the next time you have something to worry about, try doing nothing else about it, except for worrying. Allow yourself to think about it, stew over it, and stress about it

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all day long, if you like. Really try to drum up those anxious feelings. But don't do anything else. Don't try to fix it, don't talk to anyone about it, don't change a thing. Just worry.

Sounds crazy, right? One of two things will happen: you will eventually become so miserable and exhausted with worrying and frustrated that nothing has changed that you won't be able to help but fix the problem or you will realize there is nothing to worry about anymore because the problem already fixed itself.

That's the moment, hopefully, that you will realize how worthless worry really is. The only thing that can change anything is *action*. You have to do something, change something, or say something to fix whatever your problem is. Other times, like when you are waiting to receive the results of a blood test, all you can do is wait. You could choose to worry about the results until the nurse calls you, but it won't change the outcome, so why not choose to take your mind off of it and do something you love until you find out? Do you really want to waste any more hours or days of your life worrying when it won't change anything?

How Can You Be Happy with So Much to Be Depressed About?

Karen pulled the blankets over her head and tried to ignore the cheerful pop song blasting from the alarm on her cell phone. She reached a heavy arm out, blindly, and grasped for the snooze button. For the fifth time. She just couldn't do it. She couldn't get out of bed.

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Not to cook and clean and iron John's shirts and take the Mason and Emma to dance practice and go to Madelyn's spelling bee, too.

When the alarm blared for a sixth time, she turned it off. She sat up, tugging her fleece pajamas back into place, determined to get over it and get going. But her eyes fell as a thought hit her like a ton of bricks in the chest, "No one would care, anyway. No one appreciates me." The weight of it was too much. She felt tears welling up, but she didn't want to cry about it anymore, so she rolled over and went back to sleep.

Depression is one of those terms that gets thrown around from time to time and it's a little confusing. When someone says, "I'm so depressed," they might mean that they are sad, that they are grieving a loved one, or that have an actual mental disorder. When someone has clinical depression, they often require therapeutic support to function in their day to day life. However, someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one may recover in a matter of months with the support of family and friends. If you are struggling with clinical depression, you may find it difficult at times to achieve your optimum levels of happiness without therapeutic and medical support.

Whether you have a mental disorder or you are battling general feelings of dissatisfaction with your life, there is a lot you can do to help yourself:

- ✧ Be Optimistic: This is easier said than done. For some people, optimism is a natural way of life. For others, it is something that they

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have to really try to achieve. Examine your thoughts. If your first reaction is to think, “this isn't going to go well,” or “that will never work out,” take a moment to think about something that might be positive about your situation. Try to focus on that positive thought, instead.

- ⤴ Be Kind to Yourself: Many people who struggle with sadness, depression, and lack of happiness in their life will also struggle with low self-esteem. You might find yourself thinking things like, “I am just not good enough,” “I will never amount to anything,” or “I am so worthless”. Would you be happy if someone else was saying these things to you? So why is it okay to say these things to yourself? When you have a thought like this, stop yourself, and try to think of something positive to believe about yourself, instead.

- ⤴ Do Nice Things for Yourself: Take time to treat yourself to things you enjoy, whether it is watching a favorite movie or getting a pedicure. If you find yourself feeling guilty for spending time on yourself, remember that you have to fill yourself up and care for yourself before you can give to others.

- ⤴ Develop a Support Network: Choose to spend your time around friends and family who really make you feel good about yourself and whose company you genuinely enjoy. If you don't want to be around someone, choose to walk away and choose to be happy. Maintain your relationships and stay connected so that when hard times come, you have the emotional support you need.

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How Can You Be Happy with So Much to Be Angry About?

Spend a few minutes reading the news and you will find a lot to be angry about: people killing people, racial and societal injustices, schemers and scammers, criminals, famines, natural disasters, and impending wars. And then there's your personal life: that rude thing your brother said to your mother about you, the argument you had with your daughter about her choice to date that no good guy from down the street, or the pain you suffered at the hands of an abuser as a child.

Anger can really wear a person down. Whether it's the minor irritations of being stuck in a traffic jam or the major pain of arguing with a loved one, it can leave you feeling exhausted and dissatisfied with life. You might find yourself wanting to punch and scream and fight back or run and hide from it all. So, how can you be happy when there is so much to be angry about?

- ✧ Choose Your Battles: You simply can't win every argument and not every cause is worth your time. You have absolutely no power to change another person, so if you have already discussed your preferences with them a few times and nothing has changed, it might be a waste of your time to continue arguing it. You might be angry about world hunger, global warming, or pollution, but unless you can do something about it, it's not worth your time to dwell on it.
- ✧ Make a Change: If something is really making you angry, it may be time to do something about it. You could spend hours stewing over

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what somebody said to you that hurt your feelings, but if you don't tell them, they may never know that you are upset in the first place. If you have been arguing for hours on end and you feel the other person just isn't understanding you, it may be time to take a minute to look at the situation from their perspective and admit your part in the wrong-doing, as well. Allow your anger to motivate you to make positive changes in your life.

- ✦ Forgive: If the damage has already been done, it may be time to forgive the person who hurt you. Forgiveness isn't about giving the person something they deserve, but giving yourself something you deserve: freedom from the feelings of anger that weigh you down.

How to Choose Happiness

At the end of the day, you have to weigh what is most important to you. Put things into perspective and prioritize what you really want to accomplish at the end of the day, the week, or in the years to come. You will be happier when you accept that you have the power to choose happiness and you don't have to be a victim to the unfortunate circumstances of life. You only have one life to live and a limited amount of hours to live it in, so why not spend as much as that time as possible thinking and doing things that make you happy?

Chapter 4 - Myths of Happiness

Why Happiness Isn't Just a Feeling

A lot of people have the idea that happiness is just a feeling that you either have or you don't. They might spend their time passively waiting and wishing that it will magically fall upon them. Yes, there is an emotional aspect of happiness and a biological component of happiness. But if you aren't feeling happy now and you continue doing the exact same thing you are doing, you won't suddenly feel happy. Happiness is largely about our thoughts and our actions. Happiness is a choice.

Why Money Won't Buy You Happiness

Amy sat in the driver's seat of her car, scratching off the metallic squares of a lottery ticket with a quarter. She quickly scratched off the last square, eyes scanning the ticket one more time, just in case. She let out a heavy sigh, crumpling the paper disappointment in her hand before unceremoniously tossing it in the floorboard along with some old receipts, a drink cup, and four other tickets.

Have you ever found yourself daydreaming about what it would be like to win the lottery? Do you fantasize about how wonderfully happy you would feel because of all the nice things you could afford? A lot of people, like Amy, believe the lie that money can buy happiness. They sincerely believe that if they just had a little more money, a newer car, or a bigger house,

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then they would feel satisfied in life. But the truth is, money only helps build happiness to a degree. People who have at least enough money to pay their bills and meet their basic needs tend to be happier than those who do not because they experience less stress over how they will afford things. However, having large amounts of disposable income to go on vacations or buy luxury items does not necessarily equate to higher levels of satisfaction and happiness in life. A person who has a beautiful mansion in the California wine country, a second beach home in Florida, and a personal chef will still feel miserable if their marriage is falling apart and they are working in a stressful job that they don't enjoy.

Why No One Else Can Make You Happy

Jaqui elbowed her way through the hall until she was walking just behind Marcus. She breathed a sigh of relief as she settled into a chair next to him, because at least she knew she would have someone to whisper jokes with during the company meeting. When he leaned over to jest about the new "corporate compliance standards," she tried to conceal her excitement as he touched her arm. She spent most of the meeting fantasizing about what their life would be like together. He would open doors for her and take her out to dinner. He would run his fingers through her hair and tell her she looked beautiful, even if she was wearing sweatpants. They would have a grand wedding, a beautiful loft apartment in downtown, and a cat named Sir Fluffykins. And they would live happily ever after because Marcus was her other half. After the meeting, she couldn't

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help but wonder what exactly Marcus meant when he said, "See you later!"

Many people, women especially, find themselves daydreaming about life with their soul mate. They believe that if they could just marry The One, then they would feel complete and happy, because really, all of their problems stem from being single and alone. They become desperate, clinging to romantic relationships in the hopes that it will make them feel happy and whole.

Marriage and committed relationships can certainly be a source of happiness because they can provide a sense of stability and companionship for many years to come. However, if you expect a person to complete you or make you happy, you are putting too much pressure on that person and that relationship, and are setting both of you up for failure. A happy marriage happens when two whole and happy people marry each other, not when two desperate, lonely people cling to each other.

Though marriage has the potential to be a source of great joy, it has its fill of hard decisions and hard work. If you are daydreaming about a Prince Charming to make you happy, chances are you won't feel it when you and Prince Charming are trying to negotiate the terms of a mortgage refinancing option or when you are trying for the umpteenth time to get him to just put the laundry in the laundry basket. Happiness has to come from within and you have to be able to stand on your own two feet, emotionally, to make a relationship last.

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The Truth About Happiness

The truth is that external luxuries and relationships are only a minor part of our happiness. Happiness is more affected by our internal states of mind and our perspective on our situation. Think about it this way: two people can have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch and feel completely different about it. A person who is used to eating out for lunch but is forced to brown bag it and eat the peanut butter and jelly sandwich could end up feeling unsatisfied and dreaming of a nice salami sub and a lemonade. However, a person who forgot their lunch and is offered the peanut butter and jelly by a friend could end up feeling quite thankful and appreciated. The truth about happiness is that you can choose to be happier when you choose to change your perspective on the situation.