

The Pursuit of Happiness

In the book *The Happiness Trap* (2007) Dr Russ Harris suggests that the word 'happiness' has two very different meanings. Usually it refers to a feeling: a sense of pleasure, gladness or gratification. We all enjoy happy feelings, so it is no surprise that we chase them.

However like all other feelings, feelings of happiness don't last. No matter how hard you try to hold on to them. A lifetime spent in pursuit of those feelings is, in the main unsatisfying. The harder we pursue pleasurable feelings the more we are likely to suffer from anxiety and depression.

The other meaning of 'happiness' is 'a rich, full and meaningful life'. That is;

- when we take action on the things that truly matter
- when we move in directions that we consider valuable and worthy
- when we clarify what we stand for in life and act accordingly then our lives become rich and full and meaningful, and we experience a powerful sense of vitality.

This is not some fleeting feeling rather a profound sense of a life well lived. Although such a life will undoubtedly give us many pleasurable feelings, it will also give us uncomfortable ones, such as sadness, fear and anger. If we live a full life we will feel the full range of human emotions.

Happiness however can be nurtured and developed by making the most of positive experiences and finding resilience to move through those that are unpleasant.

Dr Timothy Sharp's *The Happiness Handbook* (2005) provides a number of tips to help us achieve this. Each tip is described in more detail in his book, which also has a series of accompanying workbooks.

You can also visit The Happiness Institute's website at: www.thehappinessinstitute.com.

20 Tips for Happiness

Make happiness a priority

If happiness is not at the top of your list then other things will take precedence and may interfere with your efforts to feel good.

Make plans to be happy

Those who fail to plan, plan to fail. Just like in any other life domain, the successful pursuit of happiness requires planning.

Set happy goals

Planning requires effective goal setting. Make sure your goals are SMART (i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed).

Do things that make you happy

Don't forget to do things from which you gain pleasure and do them as often as possible.

Set yourself tasks from which you'll gain satisfaction

As well as pleasure and enjoyment, satisfaction is also an important part of happiness. Make sure that when you're planning your tasks and activities you include things that might not be fun, but from which you'll gain a sense of achievement.

Play and have fun

Don't take every aspect of life too seriously. Although we all have responsibilities we can still approach many aspects of life in a playful manner.

Identify where your strengths lie

Know where your faults and weaknesses are to avoid problems. Know where your strengths lie to succeed in life.

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Utilise your strengths

Although we all can and should endeavour to improve in areas in which we're weak there's just as much to be gained from focusing on the maximal utilisation of your strengths, qualities and attributes.

Be curious

Constantly search for new ways to be happy. Keep a look out for new ways to approach life and to have fun.

Be grateful and appreciate what you have

We all have many choices in life one of which is whether to focus on all the things we don't have (which may be many), or to focus on all the things we do have. Gratitude and appreciation will significantly increase your chances of experiencing happiness.

Learn to like and ideally to love yourself

We must love before we can be loved. To love others and to be loved by others is a key component of happiness.

Invest time and energy in to your key relationships

Happy people spend more time working on and in their relationships. Happy people tend to be more supportive of other people in their life. Happy people are more generous and altruistic.

Socialise and interact with others as much as possible

As well as working to improve the quality of your relationships it is also worthwhile working to improve the number of your relationships.

Weed out unhelpful thoughts

The Dalai Lama has been quoted saying that "The central method for achieving a happier life is to train your mind in a daily practice that weakens negative attitudes and strengthens positive ones." Learn first to identify your thoughts and then begin to challenge those that are negative and unhelpful.

Plant happier, optimistic thoughts

There are two parts to developing helpful, optimistic thinking. The first is to weed out unhelpful negative thoughts and the second is to plant more positive optimistic ones. Like any other skill this becomes easier and more effective with practice.

Live a healthy life

Eat well and keep active. Exercise regularly. Although not impossible, it is difficult to be happy if you're constantly sick and not very healthy.

Ensure you gain adequate sleep and rest

It is difficult to be happy if you're constantly tired and struggling to find enough energy to get through the day. Regularly practice relaxation and/or meditation strategies.

Manage your time and priorities

Happy people tend to believe they're more in control of their lives. In doing so, they are more likely to take an active approach to solving problems. If something is not quite right in your life, do something about it.

Control what you can control

Accept what you can't control. And learn to be wise enough to know the difference.

Live in the present moment

The author, Henry Miller once said "Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognise it as such." The only moment in which we can truly be happy is the present moment. The only moment over which we have control is the present moment. So be happy now! Because if not now, then when?

...an EXTRA tip to make you happy!...

Make happiness an integral part of your life

Develop happiness routines and make them a part of your everyday living. Remind yourself that you can to do what you need to do and reward yourself as often as possible for doing what you've done.

References:

Dr Russ Harris (2007) *The Happiness Trap*

Dr Timothy Sharp (2005) *The Happiness Handbook*