

The Secrets of Happiness

What Happy People Do Differently

Most people accept that true happiness is more than just a jumble of intensely positive feelings. Happiness is probably better described as a sense of “inner peace” and “contentedness”. True happiness lasts longer than the burst of enjoyment we feel as the result of positive events. Much of this has to do with cognitive calculations: when to give your child a ‘thumbs up’, when to change your expectations, what ideals to strive for, etc.

One of the ways of looking at curiosity and the willingness to explore new things is, from a psychological perspective, that such willingness is indicative of the ability to tolerate uncertainty and anxiety. For example, when you are hungry and you want to grab some dinner, you could just go to your favorite drive through and get burgers or pizza. Or you could meet some friends and go for something you have never tried before, say, Ethiopian. Of course, you could discover that you don’t like that type of food all that much, but you may also discover some surprising delight.

#1 Secret: Seek Risk, Not Reward

Truly happy people seem to have an intuitive grasp of the fact that sustaining happiness is not just about doing things that you already are familiar with and like. Rather, happiness also requires growth and exploration and adventuring beyond your own comfort zone, even at the price of momentary happiness. Sometimes we need to explore new places, ideas and people in order to become stronger and wiser. That means, taking risks, being uncomfortable, accepting a certain amount of anxiety as productive and promoting growth.

Go ahead, though, and put in that favorite CD into your stereo to relax. That’s one of the many examples where doing what feels good is simply the best way to increase your satisfaction. Go see your best friend.

From time to time, it’s worth seeking out an experience that is novel, complicated, uncertain, or even upsetting. The happiest people opt for both, the familiar and the new, so that they can benefit, at various times, from each.

Reference: This article is based, in part, on Kashdan, T.B. & Biswas-Diener, R. What Happy People Do Differently. *Psychology Today*, Jul/Aug 2013, 50-59