



## Science of Happiness: 7 Habits of Happy People



Recently we have seen a dramatic upsurge in scientific studies on Positive Psychology and the science of happiness or to put it simply, discovering what makes happy people happy. Fortunately, many of these studies point to specific ways of thinking and acting that can strongly impact our happiness. The resulting discoveries are enriching the practices of counseling, clinical psychology, psychiatry and life coaching. In these pages, we review the most scientific studies and translate the results into non-technical English.



### Relationships

People who have one or more close friendships are happier. It doesn't seem to matter if we have a large network of close relationships or not. What seems to make a difference is if and how often we cooperate in activities and share our personal feelings with a friend or relative. Simply put, it's not the quantity of our relationships, but the quality that matters.



### Caring

People who volunteer or simply care for others on a consistent basis seem to be happier and less depressed. Although "caring" can involve volunteering as part of an organized group or club, it can be as simple as reaching out to a colleague or classmate who looks lonely or is struggling with an issue.



### Exercise

Regular exercise has been associated with improved mental well-being and a lower incidence of depression. The Cochrane Review (the most influential medical review of its kind in the world) has produced a landmark analysis of 23 studies on exercise and depression. One of the major conclusions was that exercise had "large clinical impact."



### Flow

If we are deeply involved in trying to reach a goal, or an activity that is challenging but well suited to our skills, we experience a joyful state called "flow." The experience of flow in both professional and leisure activities leads to increased positive affect, performance, and commitment to long-term, meaningful goals.





### **Spiritual Engagement and Meaning**

Studies demonstrate a close link between spiritual and religious practice and happiness. Scientists who study this phenomenon hypothesize several possible reasons for a link between religiosity, spirituality, and happiness. Religious organizations provide strong social support from like-minded people, providing various opportunities for socializing, community service and making friends with individuals from a common network. Spirituality and prayer also provide people with an opportunity to engage in a meditative act. Meditation has been shown to have a strong link with well-being because it calms the body, reduces stress and anxiety, and also supports positive thinking. The cultivation of “sacred moments” in daily life, whether through journal-writing or daily spiritual exercises, has been associated with reduced levels of stress and an increase in psychological well being. Finally, both spirituality and organized religion can help provide people with perspective, hope, and a deeper sense of meaning. By believing in something greater than themselves, it may help them stay positive in times of sadness, and foster resilience in its role as a coping strategy.



### **Strengths and Virtues**

Studies by experts such as Martin Seligman in the new field of Positive Psychology show that the happiest people are those that have discovered their unique strengths (such as persistence and critical thinking) and virtues (such as humanity) and use those strengths and virtues for a purpose that is greater than their own personal goals.



### **Positive Thinking: Optimism and Gratitude**

Of all the areas studied in the relatively young field of positive psychology, gratitude has perhaps received the most attention. Grateful people have been shown to have greater positive emotion, a greater sense of belonging, and lower incidence of depression and stress. Optimism is a trait that should become more common, judging by Winston Churchill’s famous quote that “a pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” Optimism has been proven to improve the immune system, prevent chronic disease, and help people cope with unfortunate news. Gratitude is associated with optimism and has been determined that grateful people are happier, receive more social support, are less stressed, and are less depressed. Recent research indicates that optimists and pessimists approach problems differently, and their ability to cope successfully with adversity differs as a result.

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