



are you happy?

It may seem like a simple question, but the answer can be trickier to work out than an advanced Sudoku puzzle. More than just owning the latest Zara threads (although, that *is* nice!), happiness is an overall state of mind that isn't altered by our environment. Research has shown that happiness has less to do with circumstances and more to do with genetics and, most importantly, the way we choose to think about ourselves and the world. Over the next 10 pages, we pick the brains of the happiest experts in the biz and share the happiest tips around to get you thinking about the choices you can make now, so that you can start living your best life (please excuse the Oprah-ism!). ►





happy mind

Dr Timothy Sharp, aka Dr Happy
(thehappinessinstitute.com.au)

"For the lucky ones, happiness comes easily, but for most of us, it's something we need to work at. The good news is that it's not hard! By practising the principles of my CHOOSE philosophy, you can boost your happiness and wellbeing.

clarity (of goals, direction and life purpose) Set clear targets and make specific plans to ensure they become reality.

healthy living (activity and exercise, diet, nutrition and sleep) It's hard to be happy if you're sick and tired all the time. Do whatever you can to be healthy and you boost your chances of cracking a smile.

Optimism (positive, but realistic, thinking) Happy people see themselves and the world differently; they search for more positives. This is a learned behaviour, so start practising now!

Others (the key relationships in your life) Research indicates that happy people have more (and better-quality) relationships than those who are negative. Devote time to developing and fostering your key connections.

Strengths (your qualities and attributes) Rather than spending time trying to fix their 'weaknesses', happy people use more time identifying and utilising their strengths. Find out what you're good at and do it as much as possible.

enjoy (things and live in and appreciate the present) By taking in the moment, you'll love life a lot more!"

happy body

Greg Stark, director, Better Being Personal Training (betterbeing.com.au)

"Exercise does more for life than making it a long one. It can also make it a better one by reducing anxiety and depression, enhancing your mood, improving your self-concept (the way you feel and think about yourself) and giving you a higher quality of life. Want to amp up the happiness factor when you work out? Head outdoors. Studies have shown that people who train outside experience greater feelings of revitalisation, increased energy and positivity as well as decreased tension, confusion and anger than those who exercise indoors. If a client of mine is having a stressful day, I know it's time to get out in the open and get some green therapy. Do either 20-30 minutes of cardio to raise your heart rate and stimulate the release of endorphins (happy hormones) or practise deep abdominal breathing to slow your heart rate and decrease stress hormones - yoga is great for the latter."

the happiest country in the world?

denmark (australia ranks fourth!)

happy diet

Jaime Fronzek, dietitian and nutritionist (uclinic.com.au)

"Eating the right food will sustain your energy levels, assist your concentration and keep you from feeling lethargic and irritable.

Studies have shown that certain nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids (found in oily fish, leafy greens and walnuts), proteins (from fish, meat, chicken, eggs, nuts, yoghurt, lentils) and complex carbohydrates (found in wholegrain bread, brown rice, sweet potato and fruit), can improve your mood.

On the flipside, foods such as refined sugary treats and fatty, fried takeaway can lower your mood. Alcohol may improve it and make you feel relaxed initially, but it's a strong depressant and can affect the quality of sleep, which can make your mood even worse the next day. Remember the old saying, you are what you eat!" ➔

a different happy meal



Breakfast: porridge with skim milk, a dollop of natural yoghurt and some fruit.



Lunch: wholegrain sandwich or wrap with chicken, salad and avocado.



Dinner: grilled salmon steak with steamed veggies and baked sweet potato.

snacks



fruit



boiled egg



raw nuts and seeds

happy career

Jane Lowder, founder of Max Coaching (maxcoaching.com.au)

"There's a significant correlation between your career and life satisfaction. Every job has its unfulfilling bits and bad days, but it's time to leave when work is affecting your wellbeing.

This idea of 'finding your passion' can be unhelpful. Not everyone is driven by a singular interest, and it can be guilt- and anxiety-inducing to insist that this is the only means of choosing the 'right career'. It's just as valid to pick a work path for pragmatic reasons, like paying the bills, reducing your commute so you can spend more time with loved ones, or achieving other personal goals. If you don't feel passionate about any one thing, do what interests you most. Making a good career choice is a unique process for every individual."

happy home

Jane Langof, Feng Shui expert (fengshuiconcepts.com.au)

"Feng Shui is about your relationship with your environment and how the energy in your surroundings can affect you on a mental, physical and spiritual level. Living in a home with positive Feng Shui attracts harmonious relationships and good health and abundance, which all affect happiness. To lift your mood, surround yourself with things you love; decorate your home using your favourite colours, accessories and furnishings. Allow fresh energy to circulate in your home by opening windows and doors every day. The fresh air helps you to feel reenergised and more alert. Remove any rubbish from your living and working areas; releasing this stagnant energy will help you feel more productive. Decluttering will also give you an instant boost and enable you to be open to new opportunities."

yellow is the happiest colour, representing warmth and cheeriness.

down time

It's completely normal to feel down from time to time; no-one can be happy 24/7. Depression, however, is a serious illness that'll affect one in five people at some stage in their life. Psychologist Gemma Cribb (equilibriumpsychology.com.au) explains the difference between feeling a little low and depression.

"Sadness is a temporary feeling in

response to an event, usually loss. Depression, on the other hand, affects behaviour, and people suffering from the illness will often withdraw from social situations, find it difficult to concentrate and get out of bed, and lose interest in the activities they used to enjoy.

Depressed people are prone to feelings of excessive guilt and worthlessness and

thoughts of suicide or death; they can gain or lose a large amount of weight, and can experience insomnia or hypersomnia (too much sleep). Talk to your doctor if you're concerned about this."

Visit beyondblue.org.au for more information. ➔

➔ one of the biggest-selling self-help books of all time is *the secret* by rhonda byrne (simon & schuster, \$35).

happy relationship

Jo Lamble, author of *Answers To Everyday Questions About Relationships* (Penguin, \$19.95)

"One of the keys to happiness is feeling connected to others. In order to create great relationships, it's important to have a healthy sense of self. If you don't feel good about yourself, you're vulnerable to sabotaging, jealousy, dependency and intimacy issues. Loving and respecting yourself means that you know you'll be okay if your relationship ends. It doesn't mean you want it to finish, just that you aren't dependent on another person to make you content.

Being single is an opportunity to set goals and work on any projects you've been putting off. It's also a perfect time to focus on your physical and mental health and strengthen bonds with friends and family. Do all this and you'll be relationship-ready when someone great comes along."

"one of the keys to happiness is feeling connected to others."

happy helpers

For when you're having trouble turning your frown upside down.

be grateful and appreciate everything you have

It's time to quit focusing on what you don't have. "Being grateful and appreciating all the good in your life will significantly increase your chances of experiencing happiness," says Dr Timothy Sharp.

help someone

By committing a random act of kindness, you'll experience a "helper's high", which is the feeling of increased euphoria people get after being kind to someone.

dance!

Whether it's in a club, your living room or in front of your bedroom mirror, just make like Gaga and throw some shapes to your favourite song.

surround yourself with positive people

Did you know you can catch people's emotions? "Emotional contagion" means you're influenced by the moods of those around you, so think wisely when compiling the guest list for your life.

set small goals

"And I mean ridiculously small," says Oliver Burkeman, author of *Help! How To Become Slightly Happier And Get A Bit More Done* (Text Publishing, \$32.95). Examples? "If you're completely sedentary, try exercising, at first, for 30 seconds a day. Procrastinating on a particular project? Try working on it for three minutes. Goals so tiny they make you laugh are, by definition, non-intimidating, so they sneak past the part of your brain that's always waiting to put up resistance."

drop a note
write "choose happiness" on a post-it note and stick it in a place you'll see each day.

play with mates

"Group exercise in a non-competitive environment is a great way to make training more fun-ctional," says personal trainer Greg Stark. "You're likely to laugh more, which can lift your mood in minutes."

hold a kitten

Or a puppy. Or a baby. It's impossible not to feel warm and fuzzy when gazing into the eyes of a newly born creature.

weed out unhelpful thoughts

Learn to question your negative thoughts and see if you can plant positive ones instead. The happiest people don't have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything.

talk like a happy person

Even if you don't feel particularly perky, when someone asks how you are, say "great!" with a smile on your face. You'll be surprised how faking it will lift your mood.

plan a holiday. even if it's a year away, having something to look forward to will get you through those long days in the office.

eat something

Feeling grumpier than Mr Grumpy? Your blood-sugar levels may be low. So eat something low-GI, like multigrain toast, to perk up.

forgive

A wise soul once said, "Anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." By letting go of old grudges, you're freeing yourself from pain; less pain equals more happiness.

tidy up

Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project* (HarperCollins, \$35), found spending 10 minutes tidying up every night before bed significantly improved her state of mind.

head outside

Just eight minutes in the sun each day will top up your vitamin D levels, which, in turn, will lift your energy and mood and help ward off SAD (seasonal affective disorder).

wash your sheets

Is there anything nicer than slipping into crisp, fresh sheets after a tough day? Bliss.

buy yourself a gift... because sometimes retail therapy really is the only answer. ➤

body tune-up

Science can back up what we intuitively already know about music – it makes us happy, *real* happy. Studies have found that music affects physiological functions, like respiration, heart rate and blood pressure. It's also been shown to lower amounts of the stress hormone cortisol and increase the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good hormones. So crank it up!

CLEO's happy mix

- *Little Secrets*, Passion Pit
- *Mr Jones*, Counting Crows
- *My Baby Just Cares for Me*, Nina Simone
- *Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)*, Beyoncé
- *You Get What You Give*, New Radicals
- *Dancing In The Dark*, Bruce Springsteen
- *Lose Yourself*, Eminem
- *C'mon N' Ride It (The Train)*, Quad City DJs
- *Born This Way*, Lady Gaga
- *If I Ever Feel Better*, Phoenix



happy dot com

Websites to make you smile.



superforest.org An uplifting blog about "being the environment".



thxthxthx.com This girl takes gratitude to a whole new level.



thenotebookdoodles.tumblr.com Hand-drawn musings on life and love.



happynews.com For when you just can't face another bad-news story.



happiness-project.com Gretchen Rubin's daily pursuit of happiness.

what makes YOU happy?

We jumped on Facebook and asked a few CLEO readers.

"Friends, family and really upbeat music." Michelle

"Surrounding myself with positive people who encourage, support, uplift and love me." Courtney

"Ice-cream, playing the piano, and sleeping." Min Jee

"Being fit and healthy. I love a tough workout session, followed by a massage to get me out of any rut." Nat

"Juggling being a mother and a business owner, rather than being pushed to choose one or the other. That makes me smile knowing that it's possible to have it all." Natalie

"Ticking off goals, reading a good book or magazine, happy people, and my boyfriend." Kirsty

"Playing around with my dog in the park." Amelia

"Long chats with a friend over the phone, cheese platters and a glass of red." Georgia

"Days off, shopping, escaping in a good book or movie, my cat, my hubby, getting the nursery ready for my first baby girl, holidays and good food." Candice

"Living in paradise, aka Cairns, Qld. I can go to a beautiful tropical beach whenever I like and the Great Barrier Reef is my backyard!" Rachel □

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Tell us your happy tips at cleo.com.au