

FIND HAPPINESS WITHIN

*Living a happy life is key to living successfully. Life satisfaction expert, Professor **Ed Diener**, shares with us the ins and outs of happiness.*

IT'S FUNNY, I never thought about the term 'subjective wellbeing' or being termed a 'lapperson' before. But after reading Professor Ed Diener's paper on The Remarkable Benefits of Happiness for Successful and Healthy Living, I am totally up to speed with the lingo. He says that subjective wellbeing, what us unscientific folk call 'happiness', refers to peoples' sense of wellness in their lives, both in thoughts and feelings, including satisfaction with one's life, marriage, job, health, as well as experiences such as pleasure, enjoyment, contentment and love.

American psychologist, Professor Diener, has been studying subjective wellbeing

for the past 25 years and is regarded as the world's foremost expert on the science of happiness and life satisfaction. He's heading to Australia in June to impart his findings and educate our nation on how to be happy. According to Professor Diener, when people describe what they most want out of life, happiness is almost always on their list, and very frequently at the top. He concludes that there are three major types of happiness: high life satisfaction, frequent positive feelings and

infrequent negative feelings.

'There is no single key, no magic wand – high subjective wellbeing is achieved by combining a number of different important elements in life,' says Professor Diener. 'Some people experience all three elements of happiness – they are very satisfied, enjoy life, and have only a few worries or other unpleasant emotions. Other unfortunate people are missing all three. But most of us also know individuals who have one type of happiness but not another.'

The state of happiness is complex, and is never caused just by what happens to us, but always includes our outlook on life. Every one of us has our own individual internal and external factors that affect our state of being. 'There are a

THREE TYPES OF HAPPINESS AND ITS CAUSES

- ✦ Life satisfaction – a good income, achieving one's goals, high self-esteem.
- ✦ Positive feelings – supportive friends, interesting work, extroverted personality.
- ✦ Low negative feelings – low neuroticism, one's goals are in harmony, optimistic outlook.



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number of causes ... but no single one seems to override all the others. One reason that it can be difficult to predict the happiness of others is that people vary so much in their propensity to happiness – in their personalities and outlook, which can have a strong influence on subjective wellbeing regardless of their external circumstances,' says Professor Diener.

Is it possible to be happy living in poverty and with bad health for example? Without a doubt happiness comes easier

if one is financially secure, has a supportive network of family and friends and has good health. What about those who are unhappy and are surrounded by wealth and privilege? Professor Diener says that there are also psychological influences involved such as our aspirations, social comparisons, and adaptation. 'The aim is to have challenging goals, but also to be able to adapt to what actually happens in life. One's outlook and resilience are therefore always very important to happiness.'

On the flipside, can too much happiness be a bad thing? Apparently not, as most evidence suggests happy people are healthier, more sociable and more productive. So wait no longer! Go forth and live happily ever after.

CAUSES OF HAPPINESS

INTERNAL INFLUENCES:

- + Inborn temperament, some people are just happy people
- + Personality and temperament that is part inborn and part learnt
- + Having a positive outlook on life
- + Resilience to bounce back quickly after negative events

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

- + Having sufficient material and social resources
- + Being part of a desirable society

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE TO A HAPPY ONE

↘ Make a list of the things in your life that could be changed to make your life more meaningful and happy, look at the obstacles and get rid of them.

↘ Develop more positive mental habits and practice gratitude for what you have and the people in your life.

↘ Surround yourself with people who appreciate you for who you are. Who wants to be around people who make you feel bad about yourself?

↘ In your relationships, seek to make others happy and help others, not just receiving support.

↘ Find a job that interests you and plays to your strengths rather than pays lots of money and increases your status.



Find out more

in the book *Making Couples Happy*, by John Aiken & Alison Leigh (Allen & Unwin) or for a copy of previously published articles about happiness, email editor@fitnessfirst.com.au

Professor Ed Diener

will be speaking at the Happiness & Its Causes conference, being held 19 to 20 June at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

www.happinessanditscauses.com.au