

Secrets to Finding Happiness

Contrary to the belief that happiness is hard to explain, or that it depends on having great wealth, researchers have identified the core factors in a happy life. The primary components are number of friends, closeness of friends, closeness of family, and relationships with coworkers and neighbors. Together, these features explain about 70 percent of personal happiness.

"Studies also have shown that one of the best predictors of happiness is whether a person considers his or her life to have a purpose," says David Niven, Ph.D., author of *The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People*. "Without a clearly defined purpose that people come up with themselves, they're likely to feel unsatisfied with their lives." After analyzing thousands of studies, Dr. Niven offers the following research-based secrets of happy people.

- Cultivate friendships. Rekindle past relationships and take advantage of opportunities at work or among your neighbors to expand your friendship base. "People need to feel they're part of something bigger, that they care about others and are cared about by others in return," says Dr. Niven.
- Accentuate the positive. Happy people and unhappy people explain the world differently. When an unhappy person must interpret the world, eight of ten times he or she will see the negative in an event. When a happy person does so, eight of ten times he or she will see the positive.
- Don't confuse stuff with success. You're neither a better nor a worse person because of the kind of car you drive, the size of your home or the job you have. In one study, the availability of material resources was nine times less important to happiness than the availability of "personal" resources, such as friends and family.
- Volunteer. Volumes of research show a strong consensus that volunteering contributes to happiness by creating an increased sense of purpose in people's lives. Volunteers, on average, are twice as likely to feel happy with their lives as people who don't volunteer.
- Share of yourself. Don't hold your feelings, thoughts and hopes inside. Share them with your friends and family. People who hold things inside tend to feel isolated and think no one understands them. "Those who share feel supported and more content, even if events don't go exactly as they wish," Dr. Niven says.
- Enjoy what you have. Satisfied people appreciate what they have in life and don't compare themselves to others. Valuing what you have over what you don't or can't have leads to greater happiness.
- Cherish animals. Interaction with animals provides both immediate joy and long-term positive feelings and contributes strongly to our happiness. "Animals have so much to teach us about love," says Dr. Niven. "The closer we get to animals, the more joy they give us."
- Don't face your problems alone. "Problems can appear to be unsolvable," he says. "But we're social creatures who need to discuss our problems with others, whether it be those who care about us most or those who have faced the same ones we have. When we're alone, problems fester. By asking for help, we can gain perspective and find solutions."

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