

# How to increase your Happiness and Well Being

## What Research Has Shown to be Effective

Research shows that our genetics and environment set roughly 50 percent of our “happiness set-point”. That means that at least 40-50 percent of your happiness is in your control to raise or lower. Here are some specific ways, if practiced regularly, you can make a real difference. Pick one or two to improve in your life sooner rather than later!

### Physical Self-Care:

- **Exercise:** work up to 30 minutes a day. Exercise should include a variety of cardio work that raises your heart rate, muscle building exercises and flexibility/stretching.
- **Sleep:** most Americans don’t get enough sleep, which can have dramatic effects on your mood and functioning. 7-9 hours of sleep every night at consistent times are recommended.
- **Nutrition:** food has a major impact on your physical and mental health. Unhealthy patterns of eating affect how you feel about yourself.

**Connections with Others:** Close interpersonal ties and strong social support are crucial for happiness. Strong, healthy marriages are correlated with happiness, but the better social ties you have, the happier you will likely be. Intentionally spend time with people you like!

**Focus On Experiences, Not Stuff:** Spend time and money on pleasurable activities, smiling and laughing, and adventures. These result in more happiness than spending time and money on building material wealth.

**Changing Your Outlook:** There is a clear link between a positive outlook and good health of every kind. Here are some things that have been shown to ease stress, improve your energy and health, and increase optimism:

- **Meditation & relaxation techniques** can release tension, improve thinking abilities and physical functioning. 10-20 minutes almost every day is recommended.
- **Religious or spiritual faith**
- **Express gratitude:** Regularly think about or write down or speak things for which you are grateful. In one study, people who read a letter of appreciation to someone in their lives were measurably happier almost one month later.
- **Perform acts of kindness or altruism**
- **Address your problems through journaling, systematic tackling of things that hang over you, and talk therapy (call us!) Medication may be helpful.**
- **Letting Go:** change the things you can change, and accept the things you can’t. Don’t dwell on things over which you have no control. Allow others the respect to make their own choices.

**Check Your Labs:** If your levels of thyroid or vitamin D are not optimal, your mood will be affected.

**NOT Money!** Once people’s basic needs like food and housing are met, higher incomes do little to boost happiness. The exceptions are giving money away or improving your social status which may increase happiness. Lottery winnings create only temporary, short-term happiness, which is not sustained for the long term.

**Want to talk? Now offering Individual, Couples and Family Counseling on a Sliding Fee Scale at Clark Fork Valley Hospital and Family Medicine Network:**

Kate Whipple-Kilmer, Psy.D., Resident Psychologist and Diana Reetz-Stacey, MSW

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