



Get Happy

Want more joy in your life? Start by zapping these misery-making myths

Maybe you think that to be happier, you need more than you have now—more freedom, more money, more love, more fill-in-the-blank. But commonly held myths about happiness might actually be downsizing your sense of well-being. The truth can set you free, starting right now. Do these three myths describe your take on happiness?

Myth No. 1: Either you have it or you don't. Say you have two kids you've raised identically, but they have opposite personalities—one sour, the other sunny. This makes it hard to dispute that genes play a powerful role in each person's happiness. In fact, some evidence shows that genetics contributes to about 50% of your happiness set point.

But that's a far cry from 100%, says Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD, author of *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* and professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside. "If you do the work, you can become happier, no matter what your set point is," Lyubomirsky says. "You probably won't go from a 1 to a 10, but you can become happier. It just takes commitment and effort, as with any meaningful goal in life."

Myth No. 2: Happiness is a destination. Many people think of happiness as a destination or acquisition—whether it's marriage, money, or a new location. Sure, things like these can contribute to happiness, but not as much as you might think—only about 10% of your whole happiness picture, Lyubomirsky says.



If you've done the math, you realize that about 40% of your happiness is in your hands. Lasting happiness has more to do with how you behave and think, which you ultimately control more than many of life's circumstances.

Myth No. 3: Happiness is all about hedonism. There's more to happiness than racking up pleasurable experiences. In fact, helping others might be the most direct route to happiness, notes Stephen G. Post, PhD, co-author of *Why Good Things Happen to Good People: How to Live a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life by the Simple Act of Giving*.

"When people help others through formal volunteering or generous actions, about half report feeling a 'helper's high,' and 13% even notice an alleviation of aches and pains," Post says. In fact, "for most people, a pretty low threshold of activity practiced well makes a difference," Post says.—Annie Stuart

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BOOST YOUR MOOD

If you're seeking a mystical elixir to enhance your happiness, you're bound to be disappointed. There is no "one size fits all" approach, but people who find lasting happiness tend to concentrate on their behavior and thinking. Try these three happiness boosters.

Get personal. Pursue an activity that is meaningful to you. The activity can promote a sense of gratitude, connectedness, forgiveness, or optimism, but you'll be most successful if your choice is personally relevant.

Share the wealth. Assess your strengths and develop practices that best use these gifts. Are you a good cook? Deliver a meal to a person confined to his home. A retired teacher? Consider tutoring a child.

Mix it up. Vary your activities to find and follow your bliss. Check out the "Live Happy" iPhone app, which starts with a short survey to identify the happiness strategies you're suited to, such as journaling or calling someone to express gratitude.

 Come on, get happy with more expert insights and tips from www.WebMD.com.