Can You Choose Happiness?

The pursuit of happiness is enshrined as a fundamental right in the United States, but what exactly is happiness? Essentially it is a combination of life-satisfaction and having more positive emotions than negative emotions. It can be broken down into three main components:

- Pleasure…the “feel good” aspect (the classic “warm puppy”).
- Engagement…the aspect of “living the good life”…family, friends, work, hobbies.
- Meaning…refers to using our strengths to contribute to a larger purpose.

Happiness depends upon daily positive relationships, emotions, and a global sense that life is worthwhile. Happiness can be identified as both short term and long term. You can have a bad day but still see yourself as a happy person!

Happiness comes from nature:
Roughly 50% of happiness is genetic.
Identical twins appear to share the same general level of happiness, regardless of whether they were raised together or separately. Such studies suggest that nature plays a large role in determining our “happiness setpoint.”

Happiness comes from nurture:
Roughly 40% of happiness is dependent on our daily choices, actions and activities.

How to boost your happiness:
- Build relationships
- Be grateful
- Practice kindness
- Give up grudges
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Practice Mindfulness
- Don’t focus on material wealth

Happiness “happens to you:”
Roughly 10% of happiness is determined by life circumstances (economics, environment, health)
Income appears to have an effect on happiness—but only up to a point, about $75,000 a year. People with lower incomes have more stress, but once financial worries ease, positive emotions plateau. External circumstances seem to have an effect only on short-term happiness. Classic studies that compared the emotional well-being of lottery winners, paraplegics, and quadriplegics found all three groups had similar levels of current happiness, suggesting that once the initial windfall or trauma fades, we adapt to change and return to our original happiness setpoint.
**Happiness is contagious:**

Research finds that happiness spreads in a social network (like work!) up to three degrees of separation. On average, every happy friend or colleague increases your own chance of being happy by nine percent. Each unhappy friend decreases it by seven percent. Having a happy friend who lives within a mile of you increases the probability that you will be happy by 25%. Happiness spreads between next door neighbors, siblings that live nearby, and spouses so that good feelings continue to move from person to person, even when there is not a direct connection to the original happy person!

Science tells us that there is a very strong correlation between happiness and good health, both in individuals and communities, so take action to create a happier you and create a happier society.

- Join the global happiness movement at “Action for Happiness.”
- Join the local I am happy project.
- How happy are people across the world? Play with this interactive map to find out.