



Dr Bruce Wells
the happiness expert

Want more happiness & fulfillment?

take the
Happiness Challenge

featured in:   Herald Sun    

THE HOW OF HAPPINESS

What the Book is about in a Nutshell

The How of Happiness is a comprehensive guide to understanding the elements of happiness based on years of ground breaking scientific research. It is also a practical, empowering, and easy-to-follow workbook, incorporating happiness strategies, exercises in new ways of thinking, and quizzes for understanding individual happiness.

The book is made up of 3 parts. In part 1 the reader learns about the theory behind the 40% of happiness that is within your control. In part 2 the reader discovers 12 happiness-enhancing strategies. Finally, in part 3, the reader learns about 5 important hows behind abiding happiness.

PART 1: HOW TO ATTAIN REAL AND LASTING HAPPINESS

The pursuit of happiness implies that happiness is an object that one has to chase or discover whereas Sonja prefers the creation of construction of happiness as it is in our power to fashion it within ourselves.

We have been conditioned to believe that the wrong things will make us lastingly happy such as hot dates, being healthy, work promotions, having lots of money or good looks, etc. Happiness is determined by: 50% accounted for by their genetically determined set points where we are likely to return to our happiness baseline even after major setbacks or triumphs. Only 10% of our happiness is explained by life circumstances or situations such as whether we are rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, beautiful or plain, married or divorced, etc. Importantly, 40% of our happiness is due to our daily intentional activities that is completely within our control, that is, what we do and what we think every day.

Benefits of being happier: you feel good, more sociable and energetic, more charitable and cooperative, better liked by others, more flexible thinking, more productive in their jobs, earn more money, make better leaders, more resilient, stronger immune systems, and healthier.

Happiness defined: experience of positive wellbeing + general life satisfaction (meaningful).
The dampening effect of Hedonic adaptation on happiness: Many people hope that changing their circumstances will deliver happiness (moving to another city, cosmetic surgery, buying an expensive house). However, because of rising aspirations and social comparison we quickly become used to our new circumstances

The secret to overcoming hedonic adaptation: Use the 40% and make things happen in your life by pursuing new understandings, seeking new achievements, controlling your thoughts and feelings.

How to find the right happiness activities for you via 3 methods: one, find activities that fit with the source of your unhappiness (e.g. pessimist cultivates optimism); two, activities that

fit with your strengths (e.g. creative person expresses gratitude through writing); three, activities that fit with your lifestyle (e.g. if life is hectic choose activities that don't take time out of your day like counting blessings).

PART 2: HAPPINESS ACTIVITIES

1. Practising gratitude and positive thinking

Gratitude is a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life. It allows you to focus on the present moment and appreciate your life as it is today.

Benefits of gratitude: promotes the savouring of positive life experiences, bolsters self-esteem, helps people cope with stress and trauma, encourages moral behaviour, helps build social bonds, inhibits social comparisons, and is incompatible with negative emotions.

Practise gratitude by: keeping a daily gratitude diary, write gratitude letters to others.

Optimism is concerned with people's determination to attain a certain goal, and their beliefs regarding specific steps needed to reach that goal.

Why optimism boosts happiness: if you're optimistic about the future you'll invest effort in reaching future goals; it prompts us to engage in active and effective coping; it promotes positive moods, vitality, and high morale.

Practise optimism by: keeping a best possible selves diary or a goal achievement diary, identify automatic pessimistic thoughts and then consider alternative interpretations for the situation.

2. Avoid overthinking and social comparison

Overthinking is thinking too much, needlessly, passively, endlessly, and excessively pondering the meanings, causes, and consequences of your character, feelings and problems.

Social comparison involve upward comparisons ("He's paid a higher salary") leading to feelings of inferiority and distress and downward comparisons ("He got laid off") leading to feelings of guilt and fears of suffering the same equally bad fate.

Avoid overthinking and social comparison by: distract yourself from your ruminations, shout out "Stop", set aside a worry period each day, talk to a sympathetic friend, unburden your worries on paper, act to solve your problems, dodge situations that trigger overthinking, meditate, take in the big picture.

3. Practising acts of kindness

Benefits of being kind: leads you to perceive others more positively and more charitably; often relieves guilt, distress, or discomfort over others' difficulties and suffering; delivers a welcome distraction from your own troubles; you may begin to view yourself as an altruistic and compassionate person; gives you confidence and a feeling of usefulness; gives you a feeling of control over your life; promotes a sense of meaningfulness and value in one's life; others like you and appreciate you and they, in turn, are encouraged to be kind also.

Practise kindness by: doing something special for others that you don't normally do, vary your acts of kindness (gift of time, surprise someone, listen to someone's concerns, do a kind deed and tell no one).

4. Nurture social relationships

Social support can be tangible (driving someone to the hospital), emotional (listening, reassuring), and informational (giving financial advice).

Invest in relationships by: making time for the other person; creating a media-free zone in your home; expressing admiration, appreciation, and affection; taking delight in another person's good fortune; managing conflict by being hard on the problem and soft on the person; and sharing rituals, dreams, and goals.

5. Developing strategies for coping

Types of coping: problem-focused coping (generating solutions by weighing up the pros and cons and then acting) which is preferable when people believe that something constructive can be done about their situation, and emotion-focused coping (dealing with one's emotional reactions to an event) which is preferable when the situation is uncontrollable or you feel that the negative event must be endured.

Finding benefits in trauma: involves seeing some value or gain in your loss or negative life event (personal growth, change in life perspective, wake-up call where you reorder your priorities, learning to live more in the present, giving fuller expression to one's feelings, developing more compassion for others, renewed belief in one's ability to endure and prevail, more satisfying philosophy of life, finding more meaning in life).

6. Learning to forgive

Forgiveness involves suppressing or mitigating one's motivations for avoidance and revenge and, ideally, replacing them with more positive or benevolent attitudes, feelings, and behaviours. Also, forgiveness is not reconciliation or pardoning/condoning the transgressor. Why forgive? Forgiving is something you do for yourself, not for the person who wronged you. Also, you are then able to move on and you are able to re-establish closeness with someone else.

Practise forgiveness by: appreciate being forgiven by someone else; imagine forgiving someone who wronged you and do not define them solely by their offending behaviour; write a letter of forgiveness to someone who hurt you; practise empathy; ruminate less.

7. Increasing flow experiences

Flow is a state of intense absorption and involvement with the present moment. You're totally immersed in what you're doing, the activity is challenging, and you feel strong and alert and in control.

Benefits of flow: You do the activity for the sheer sake of doing it, it is intrinsically rewarding. To experience flow you need to establish a balance between skills and challenges. Obtaining flow as often as possible will lead to greater happiness. It is pleasurable and fulfilling. Flow leads us to be involved in life, to have a sense of control, and to have a strong sense of self. Increase flow experiences by: control your attention; adopt new values where you are open to new and different experiences, have a life-long learning mentality; learn when and the type of activities that allow you to experience flow; transform routine tasks into something more meaningful and stimulating; experience flow in conversation by listening actively to others and asking follow-up questions; see your work as a calling rather than as a job or career.

8. Savouring life's joys

Savouring is defined as any thoughts or behaviours capable of generating, intensifying, and prolonging enjoyment.

We rarely seem to live in and savour the present moment, believing that what counts most will happen in the future. Yet the ability to savour the positive experiences in your life is one

of the most important ingredients of happiness. You savour the past by reminiscing about the good old days. You savour the present by wholly living in and relishing the present moment. You savour the future by anticipating and fantasizing about upcoming positive events.

Foster savouring by: relishing ordinary experiences, savouring a positive experience and reminiscing with family and friends, engaging in positive reminiscence where you transport yourself to a different time or place using photos or dreams, celebrating good news; being open to beauty and excellence in nature or others; being mindful and taking pleasure in the senses when eating an apple or feeling the warmth of the sun, seeking bittersweet experiences, and savouring with your camera.

9. Committing to your goals

Benefits of committed goal pursuit: provides a sense of purpose and a feeling of control over our lives; bolsters our self-esteem; adds structure and meaning to our lives; helps us learn to master our use of time; helps us cope better with problems; involves engaging with other people.

Types of goals you should pursue: intrinsic goals which are inherently satisfying and meaningful to you, which allow you to grow as a person, develop emotional maturity, and contribute to your community; authentic goals which are self-determined and which satisfy your own true values and innate needs; approach goals where you approach a desired outcome as opposed to avoiding an unwanted outcome; flexible and appropriate goals where we choose goals based on our circumstances and opportunities; activity goals where you experience new challenges as opposed to trying to change your circumstances by buying a bigger TV or a more expensive house.

10. Practising religion and spirituality

Religious people are happier, healthier, and recover better from traumas than nonreligious people.

Benefits of practising religion: social support, sense of identity, sharing one another's burdens, larger social networks, sharing important political and social values, being able to find meaning in ordinary events as well as traumatic events, being able to find meaning in life and that our lives have a purpose.

Benefits of practising spirituality: superior mental health, cope better with stressors, more satisfying marriages, use drugs and alcohol less often, physically healthier, live longer.

Practise religion and spirituality by: seek meaning and purpose in your own life, pray, find the sacred in the ordinary.

11. Meditation

Crucial elements of successful meditation: be nonjudgmental, non-striving, patient, trusting, open, and let go.

Benefits of meditation: heightened state of awareness and alertness, profound state of physiological rest, stronger immune response to colds, reduces reactivity to stress, boosts positive mood and self-esteem and feelings of control, enhances quality of relationships, able to better savour the present moment, more centred and open-minded.

12. Taking care of your body (physical activity)

Benefits of PA: reduces anxiety and stress, protects us from dying, reduces the risk of numerous diseases such as hypertension and diabetes and colon cancer, builds bones and

muscles, increases the quality of life, improves sleep, protects against cognitive impairments as we age.

Why does PA make people happier? Reasons include self-esteem and mastery, potential for flow experiences as well as a distraction from worries, opportunities for social contact, physiological effects such as elevated endorphins and euphoria-inducing opioids, and immediate boost in positive emotions.

PART 3: SECRETS TO ABIDING HAPPINESS

It's easy to become happier for a short duration. The challenge lies in sustaining the new level of happiness. The five hows show you how to attain long-term happiness increases.

How 1. Positive emotion

Happy people experience positive states more frequently than do their less happy peers. Each of the happiness activities has the potential to produce a stream of positive experiences. Moments of pleasure don't just make you feel good, they also broaden your horizons and build your social, physical, and intellectual skills.

Happiness activities: boost positive emotions and also foil the effects of negative feelings; boost positive thinking; encourage positive experiences.

How 2. Optimal timing and variety

Strive to time your use of the happiness activities in ways that deliver you greatest satisfaction, serenity, or joy, that is, in ways that thwart adaptation. You will achieve this through self-experimentation.

How 3. Social support

Any change in behaviour that requires effort and dedication will be made easier if your spouse, children, friends, parents, etc, are supportive. They can motivate you, provide positive feedback, and remind you to continue practising your activities.

How 4. Motivation, effort, and commitment

How 5. Habit

Habits form with repetition and practise. The more often you initiate a positive activity the stronger the connection becomes between that activity (e.g. savouring or appreciating) and the cues around you (family dinner or daily hassles).



Dr Bruce Wells is a happiness expert and professional speaker with a PhD in psychology and degrees in health promotion and physical education.

He has over 20 years' experience in the health and wellness industry in Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. He is a former school teacher, university professor, international tour guide, personal fitness trainer, and is the author of *Happiness Anywhere Anytime*.

Bruce regularly appears on Channel 9's Today show, various radio programs and regularly contributes articles to syndicated papers across the country. He is also a professional speaker delivering presentations to corporate and community health groups. For further details of his programs go to www.brucewells.com.au