



Positive Psychology Strategies for Increased Happiness

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive Psychology is a growing, research-based field of study. Beyond just offering strategies for recovering from mental illness, its goal is to *help people thrive*. Positive Psychology is about achieving an optimal level of functioning by **building upon a person's strengths** in both personal and professional life. It also focuses upon increasing our experience of positive states such as *happiness, joy, contentment, life satisfaction, creativity, gratitude, optimism, wisdom, courage, love, awe*, etc. According to Positive Psychology, you are happy when you feel as if your life is going well, according to the standards *you* have chosen. There are **three components of happiness**:

1. Momentary mood – how you feel right now
2. Life satisfaction – your overall evaluation of life
3. Assessment of specific life domains – work, relationships, finances, health, etc.



Why are positive emotions and life satisfaction important?

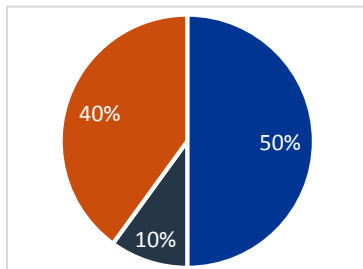
They contribute to:

- better physical health and immune function (less visits to the doctor, faster healing)
- longer life
- greater creativity
- increased success at work (better decision-making and performance, increased earnings)
- higher quality relationships (more friends, stronger partnerships, etc.)
- increased prosocial behavior (more volunteering, connection to community, etc.)
- greater ability to cope with challenges

How much happier could YOU be?

Positive Psychology research indicates that your capacity for happiness is set by:

1. **Genetics** (biology and heredity) – 50%
2. **Circumstances** (sex, ethnicity, income, education, geography, etc.) – 10%
3. **Intentional activity** (behavioral choices, thinking patterns, etc.) – 40%



Intentional Activity is where you can exert the most control if you want to increase your own happiness. There are skills and strategies you can learn to increase happiness and life satisfaction. Happy people experience hardship like we all do, but their response to it is to bounce back, to be resilient.

What is the “Good Life”?

Dr. Martin Seligman, a leading researcher in the field of Positive Psychology, uses the **PERMA Model** to answer that question:

Positive Emotion: what we feel (joy, pleasure, comfort, warmth, etc.)

Engagement: being fully absorbed in stimulating activities, being in “flow”

Relationships with others that are positive, nurturing, rewarding

Meaning: serving some purpose that is larger than oneself

Accomplishment: pursuit of achievement and mastery



Some strategies for increasing happiness in your life:

- ✓ Focus upon problem-solving, not just venting
- ✓ Take time to build quality relationships with supportive people
- ✓ Count your blessings and practice gratitude
- ✓ Take time to engage in random acts of kindness
- ✓ Respond actively and constructively, celebrating when others share good news with you
- ✓ Attend to others mindfully, and practice compassion and empathy
- ✓ Be kind to yourself, rather than overly self-critical or perfectionistic
- ✓ Savor experiences because this will intensify and prolong your enjoyment of them
- ✓ Set meaningful goals for yourself that provide structure and purpose, give a sense of identity and increase self-esteem
- ✓ Build intrinsic motivation, rather than just relying upon doing things to please others
- ✓ Seek healthy challenges, stretching your abilities just a bit beyond your comfort zone to realize your potential
- ✓ Appreciate what you already have rather than focusing only upon what you still desire
- ✓ Avoid the temptation to complain and reinforce negativity; instead, cultivate optimism and practice positively reframing your circumstances

Additional Resources:

Lyubomirsky, Sonja (2007). *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. The Penguin Press.

Martin Seligman’s Positive Psychology Center website: <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

Complete validated positive psychology measures: <http://www.authentic happiness.org>



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