

HEALTH AND STRESS

The Newsletter of The American Institute of Stress

Number 9

1996

HAPPINESS: IS IT MORE THAN JUST THE ABSENCE OF STRESS?

Hans Selye, who coined the term "stress" as we now use it, was fond of saying "Everyone knows what stress is, but in reality, nobody knows." And, despite his and numerous other attempts over the past six decades, there is still no satisfactory scientific definition of stress. Similarly, although everyone knows what happiness is, and the term has been in use for six centuries, it has also eluded objective definition.

Some things can be better defined by explaining what they are not. There is no definition of Type B behavior. It is simply the absence of Type A traits. Similarly, happiness has been defined as the interval between periods of unhappiness, or the absence of stress. However, this is not very helpful, since these terms are equally equivocal and ambiguous. In addition, most of us view happiness as a very positive emotion, rather than the relative absence of negative feelings.

Happiness is difficult to define because it represents different things for each of us. There are over 100 words or phrases for states that imply happiness, but the coloring of each reflects various intensities, tints, and hues, as illustrated in the list following this Editorial. In addition,

like stress, the term is often used to refer to the circumstances responsible for how we feel, or appear to feel. People may "put on a happy face", even though they are sad. Family Christmas gatherings are usually referred to as "happy" occasions, but can be stressful events that are dreaded by some. A steep roller coaster ride might be an exhilarating, thrill, or a terrifying torment. For many, having a puppy brings happiness. For others, "man's best friend" is viewed as an expensive, time consuming nuisance. Thus, one man's happiness can be someone else's misery.

Happiness is derived from *happe*, an Old English word meaning chance, luck, or anything that "happens". Like luck, such a "happenstance" could also be bad, or a "mishap". The meaning of happiness began to change around the 15th century to refer to a more sustained sense of contentment, as opposed to joy or gladness, which were of shorter duration. The modern sense of being highly pleased did not develop until the early 16th century.

The Oxford English Dictionary definition still lists "Good fortune or luck; success, prosperity" as its first choice, followed by "the state of pleasurable content of mind, which results from success or the attainment of what is considered good". The absence of any Greek or Latin roots, suggests that its counterpart in other languages has different origins and connotations. The French phrase *joie de vivre*, or joy of life, probably comes closer to expressing how most of us view happiness.

(Continued on page 2)

ALSO INCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE

The Pursuit Of Happiness.....	2
The Anatomy And Physiology Of Happiness.....	2
The Blur Between Brain, Mind, And Body.....	4
Wealth, Work, Play, And Happiness.....	5
Hints From The Happyologists.....	5
Is Perpetual Happiness Desirable?.....	6
How Can We Attain Happiness?.....	6
What Is Happiness?.....	last page

Health and Stress: The Newsletter Of The American Institute Of Stress is published monthly. Annual subscription rate \$35.00 (U.S.), \$45.00 (Foreign). Copyright © 1996 by The American Institute of Stress, 124 Park Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703. 1-800-24-RELAX. All rights reserved.

HEALTH AND STRESS

*The Newsletter of
The American Institute of Stress*

Paul J. Rosch, M.D., F.A.C.P.

Editor-in-Chief

Contributing Editors from The Board of Trustees of
The American Institute of Stress

Robert Ader, Ph.D., Rochester, NY
Herbert Benson, M.D., Boston, MA
Michael E. DeBakey, M.D., Houston, TX
Joel Elkes, M.D., Louisville, KY
Bob Hope, Palm Springs, CA
John Laragh, M.D., New York, NY
James J. Lynch, Ph.D., Baltimore, MD
Kenneth R. Pelletier, Ph.D., M.D., Berkeley, CA
Ray H. Rosenman, M.D., San Francisco, CA
Charles F. Stroebel, Ph.D., M.D., Hartford, CT
Alvin Toffler, New York, NY

(Continued from page 1)

The Pursuit Of Happiness

The importance of happiness in life and health has been emphasized by philosophers and physicians from Aristotle to Freud. David Hume, who died the year of the Declaration of Independence, wrote:

"the great end of all human industry is the attainment of happiness, for this were arts invented, sciences cultivated, laws ordained, and societies modeled, by the most profound wisdom of patriots and legislators. Even the lonely savage who lies exposed to the inclemency of the elements and the fury of wild beasts, forgets not, for a moment, this grand object of his being."

The Declaration of Independence emphasized the importance of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Why not "Life, Liberty, and Happiness"? Is it because life and liberty are the same for everyone and can be measured, while happiness is different and not quantifiable? Thomas Jefferson, its prime author, was very meticulous and articulate, as were Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and the other members of the committee responsible for drafting this proclamation. Congress also scrutinized their final version, eliminating more than a third of the present document, before approving it. The opening paragraph was clearly based on the beginning of the Virginia Declaration of Rights,

which referred to "the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety". However, the resultant condensation to "the pursuit of happiness" has little practical meaning, and may be misleading. One might just as well try to pursue good luck. For some hedonistic pleasure seekers, the persistent pursuit of happiness per se never results in lasting contentment, and is often one of the chief sources of unhappiness.

Happiness depends more on the journey and our manner of traveling, than any destination or state to be arrived at. When he was 20, the famous philosopher, John Stuart Mill, became obsessed with the thought that even if he had everything he ever wanted, he could still never be happy. Although depressed and even suicidal for months, he subsequently underwent a profound personality change, and later explained in his autobiography:

"The experiences of this period had two very marked effects on my opinions and character. In the first place, they led me to adopt a theory of life very unlike that on which I had before acted . . . I never indeed wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness along the way. . . The enjoyments of life are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing, when they are taken *en passant*, without being a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. Ask yourself whether you are happy and you cease to be so."

The Anatomy And Physiology Of Happiness

Scientists have been able to tell us something about where and why we feel happy. Delight, disgust, fear, anger, and other primal emotions, are mediated mainly by the amygdala and hypothalamus, ancient structures which are part of the brain's limbic system. Stimulation of the amygdala in conscious neurosurgical patients can evoke feelings of deep relaxation and euphoria, and

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

similar animal studies have also identified pleasure sites in specific areas of the hypothalamus. It is possible to instantly stop an enraged, charging bull dead in his tracks, by remote control stimulation of an electrode implanted in a pleasure center.

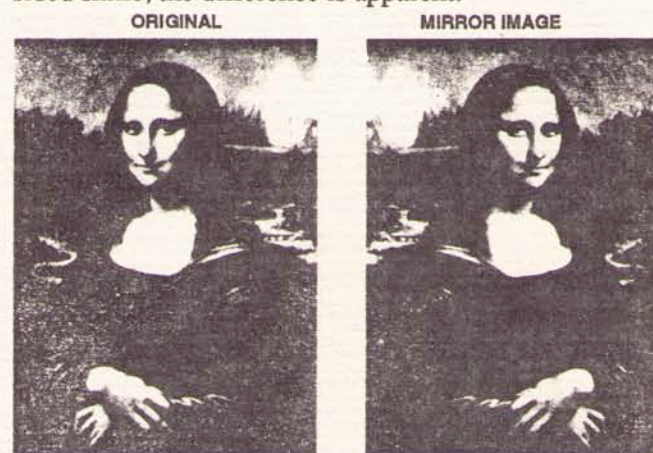
There are important connections between these areas and the frontal lobes of the cerebral cortex, where feelings are interpreted. Lust originates in the limbic system, but love comes from the brain's neocortex, which developed much later in our evolution. Reptiles have no neocortex, and cannot experience maternal love, so baby snakes hide to avoid being eaten by their parents. In contrast, protecting their offspring is a very powerful instinct in humans and other mammals. When the connections between the limbic system and the cortex are severed, individuals are just as intelligent as before, but are incapable of experiencing feelings like shame or regret. As a result, they make the same blunders in interpersonal relationships over and over, because they are unable to appreciate that their actions have repeatedly caused others to be unhappy or angry.

The two hemispheres of the brain differ with respect to emotions. The left hemisphere is more involved with happiness and other good feelings, while sadness and anger are associated with the right. When subjects were asked to recall the saddest and happiest episodes in their lives, the left hemisphere was most active with happiness, and the right with sadness. People with predominant left frontal lobe activity also report more positive emotions, and derive greater happiness from daily activities.

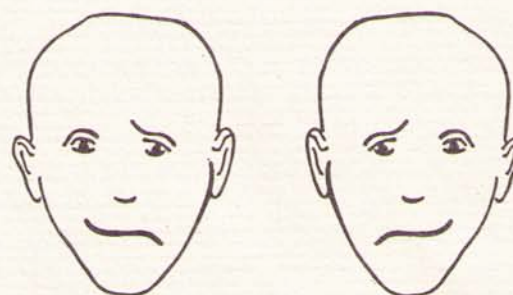
Differences in frontal lobe activity can be demonstrated in week old babies, and infants with more active left prefrontal lobe activity are happier, and less likely to cry when briefly separated from their mothers. When children were asked to play active fun games, those with greater left sided activity hopped up and down with much more glee and laughter, compared to the relatively restrained right siders. These tendencies seem to be stable over time, suggesting that to some extent, happiness may be inherited. It also supports the notion of a congenital set point for happiness similar to that proposed for weight in certain individuals, who hover around the same figure regardless of how much or how little they eat.

The more happy left hemisphere controls the right side of the body. The right hemisphere, which is more associated with sadness, has domination over the left side. Scientists have therefore wondered whether there might be differences in the expression of these emotions on different sides of the body. Smiling appears to affect

both sides of the face equally. The Mona Lisa's smile is often described as ambiguous, puzzling, strange, mysterious, or enigmatic, since it does not really reflect happiness. This is because not both, but only the left side of her face is smiling. However, this side is controlled by the right hemisphere, which is associated with unhappiness. If you look at a mirror image showing a right sided smile, the difference is apparent.



Da Vinci may have done this on purpose. According to legend, he had musicians constantly available to help his subject sustain her peculiar mood. Try smiling with both sides of your face, then just the left side, and finally, the right. Hold each position for a few seconds and notice the differences in the way you feel. Left side only results in more of a sensation of scorn than happiness. We also appear differently. If you look at the center of each of the two mirror images below, which face seems happier? As one might suspect, it is the one with the upturned lip on the right side of the face, which is governed by the happier left hemisphere.



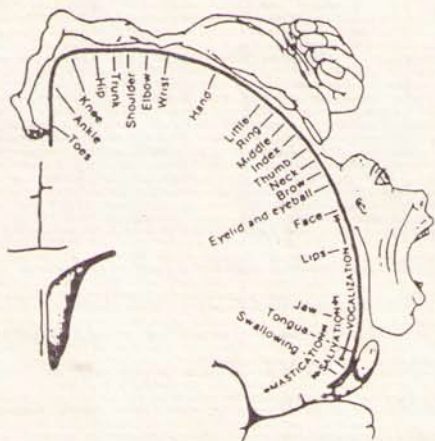
(Adapted from *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* by Julian Jaynes)

Why emotions should be separated in the brain may be related to the fact that the two hemispheres also oversee different types of muscle activities. The right has more control over the motor functions of the large muscles of the arms and legs, while the left regulates smaller movements, such as those in the fingers.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

From an evolutionary standpoint, it would be more efficient to put those emotions associated with fight or flight responses in the same area. This would allow us to move more rapidly and have greater strength in combat when responding to life threatening situations. The left hemisphere's control over the smaller muscles of the fingers more readily facilitates our appreciation of happiness and pleasure when we touch a loved one, or pet a puppy. In humans, the area of the cortex devoted to the hands and fingers is much greater than the hips or legs, and is represented more in the left, or happier hemisphere, as noted in the following diagram.



Neuropeptide chemical messengers in the brain transmit different types of happiness signals, particularly serotonin, dopamine, and the endorphins. Serotonin increases our sense of well-being, and deficiencies are associated with depression. Levels are extremely low in suicidal patients, and antidepressant drugs like Prozac and Zoloft promote happiness by increasing serotonin levels. Dopamine provides a sense of pleasure and reward, and is an essential component of morphine manufactured in poppies. It is also a building block for the endorphins, which have powerful pain relieving properties, and are responsible for euphoric states such as the "runner's high". Addictive drugs block dopamine receptor sites, allowing concentrations to remain higher for longer periods of time. When dopamine levels fall, we crave these substances to sustain a high, but they are progressively less effective as receptors become satiated. The ability of cocaine, heroin, morphine, and amphetamines to provide pleasure disappears when dopamine containing neurons are destroyed, or drugs that block their entry into dopamine receptor sites are administered. The number of dopamine receptors can be influenced by genetic factors, which supports a heritable basis for happiness, and also explains why some people seem to be more susceptible to addictions than others.

The Blur Between Brain, Mind, And Body

The reason the limbic system is the seat of emotions may be that it is the focal point for neuropeptide activities. The highest concentrations of opiate receptors in the brain are found in the hypothalamus and amygdala. However, similar neuropeptide receptor sites can be found in the heart, gut, kidney, and other locations. This suggests that emotions can also be detected or even originate in the body. Feeling "heart felt joy", expressing condolences "from the bottom of my heart", being "broken hearted", "nauseated with disgust" and other "gut feelings", may be more than figures of speech. And, as we learn more about the ability of happiness to improve health, the Old Testament adage, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine", takes on a new meaning. There is other evidence that the mind may not reside exclusively in the brain that further blurs the distinction between brain, mind, and body.

Just as the mind can affect the body, the reverse can be true, as illustrated by the prior example of the two way conversation between our face and our feelings. More of the cerebral cortex is devoted to the face than any other part of the body, and its control of the facial musculature is phenomenal. This evolutionary development served an important purpose, because it allowed the expression and projection of very different emotional messages, that are instantly recognizable by such things as smiles, frowns, baring of the teeth, grimaces, raised eyebrows, etc. Happiness is revealed primarily around the mouth and eyes. The corners of the lips draw back and up in an open or closed smile. A lifting of the cheeks causes a crease from the outer edges of the mouth to the nose. Smaller and more numerous wrinkles emanate from the outer corners of the eyes like "crow's feet", and when persistent, are also often referred to as "laugh lines".

Conversely, we have seen that the position of our facial muscles can also influence how we feel. If you say "cheese" and hold this position for a few moments, you are apt to experience a brief pleasant or happy sensation. But, if you purse your lips in a persistent pout, an unhappy feeling is more likely to result. When we feign facial expressions to reflect happiness, sadness, anger, or fright, we tend to experience these same emotions. So-called "method actors" often take advantage of this. In certain adverse situations, persuading people to "keep smiling", or "put on a happy face", may be good advice that has scientific support.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Wealth, Work, Play, And Happiness

What good is happiness? You can't buy money with it. If you ask most people what would make them happy, winning the lottery would be high on the list, or that the three most important keys to happiness are money, money, money. Others concede that while money doesn't necessarily buy happiness, it at least allows you to be unhappy in greater luxury. Surprisingly, happiness is really not tremendously influenced by what we have. Success is getting what you want, but happiness lies more in wanting what you get.

Some people are happy with little, while others are miserable with much. Happiness depends more on learning how to enjoy and appreciate what you have, while recognizing that improvement is always possible. It is determined by a delicate and ongoing interplay between who we are, what we have, and what we want. Not having everything you want is important, since it spurs motivation and creativity that can contribute to future happiness. However, it is equally essential to avoid the frustration of desiring those things that will always be beyond reach. You cannot be happy if you continually spend your time anxiously hoping for future good luck, or in regretting past events that can't be changed. Thomas Jefferson noted, "It is neither wealth nor splendor, but tranquillity and occupation that give happiness", and these are what should be pursued. Happiness comes from being pleased with who we are and what we do. These are the things to "pursue".

An old Chinese proverb advises that if you wish to be happy for an hour, get intoxicated. If you wish to be happy for three days, get married. But if you wish to be happy forever, become a gardener. In other words, find something to do that can be enjoyable because it is productive, and provides a sense of pride. Work is an essential ingredient of happiness. It allows us to create material and cultural enrichments that ennoble our lives, and the lives of others. The richest and most successful men, as well as the greatest artists, have often recounted how happy they were in their work, and how their success resulted from the energy and love they put into it. It was the work itself that brought them happiness, rather than money, or fame. Others can derive similar happiness from hobbies, projects, and volunteer activities. Many people dream of never having to work, but become disappointed when they retire to a life of leisure, and the realization that some of their happiest hours were experienced while working. Although both are important, happiness is more dependent on liking what you do, as opposed to just doing whatever you like.

Hints From The Happylogists

Some psychologists have spent their lives studying the nature of happiness, and its relationship to heredity, personality, and environmental influences. The overall conclusion of these so-called "happylogists", is that most of us are more apt to be happy than unhappy, and that our individual level of happiness tends to remain the same over time, despite drastic changes in health or wealth. When 6,000 men and women were followed, those who were relatively happiest at the beginning, were in the same category ten years later, regardless of significant up and down daily fluctuations.

It is important to distinguish between the trait of happiness, which remains fairly stable over time, and a state of happiness, which varies considerably, depending on current good or bad experiences. A survey of lottery winners showed they were much happier for the next month or two, but one year later were back to their original happiness levels. Similarly, paraplegics interviewed a year after their disabling accident, showed surprisingly little change from the average values of others. People adapt fairly quickly to good or bad things in their lives, and as they do, their expectations change. When you're riding high, you tend to take things for granted, and if something good happens, it doesn't provide as much happiness because you expect it. When you're deprived or down in the dumps, even seemingly minor improvements in your status may produce stronger than anticipated uplifts.

In addition to expectations, comparisons are important. For example, imagine you have a multimillionaire, marriage-related uncle you had never met who suddenly died in an accident. You might be surprised with delight to hear that he had left you and several other distant relatives \$5,000 in his will. On the other hand, you would be apt to be much less happy, if you subsequently learned that he had originally bequeathed \$50,000 to everyone, but had revised his will, only with respect to you, just days before he died. Happiness is also influenced by how we feel compared to others, with respect to wealth, lifestyle, fame, physical attractiveness, or athletic skills. When one baseball player's salary was raised from \$850,000 in 1990 to 2.3 million in 1991, instead of the 3.25 million he requested, he sulked, saying there was nothing he could do to satisfy the team, and told reporters "I'm so sad all the time."

Happiness depends on the gap between what we have and what we want or expect. As the lottery winners adapted to their new found fortunes after a year, their expectations and comparison levels changed, because

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

they realized that many others were much wealthier. In addition, they were less apt to derive happiness from their daily activities and personal relationships, which also helped bring them back down to their original happiness set point.

Benjamin Franklin noted, "Happiness is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen, as by the little advantages that occur every day." Our happiness level depends more on the frequency than the intensity of positive emotions, and how much of the time we feel good, as opposed to intermittent episodes of extreme pleasure and "high fives". A minor event like a good meal cannot only make us momentarily happy, but also improve our subsequent disposition and how we appraise things. In one experiment, researchers planted dollar bills in a mall, and then asked those who had found them such questions as, "How happy are you with your marriage? How frequently does your car need major repairs? Do you plan to buy the same refrigerator? Compared to control shoppers who had not experienced the rather trivial and transient happiness of finding a dollar, they reported better marriages, fewer problems with their cars, and were even more likely to buy the same refrigerator.

In analyzing situations that tend to make people feel happy, close personal relationships, satisfaction with work or some ongoing project, anticipating a pleasurable event, and religious faith, were high on the list. Based on one hundred thousand interviews dealing with optimal experiences, one happyologist concluded that the common denominator appeared to be what many people referred to as "flow", or being caught up in the feeling of working towards some achievable goal. While there is good evidence that happiness and personality characteristics are influenced by heredity, such traits can also be acquired. Finding ways to feel a sense of "flow" more frequently appears to be one of the most effective ways to increase your happiness set point.

Is Perpetual Happiness Desirable?

Aldous Huxley depicted the perils of a life of permanent pleasure in *Brave New World*, his projection of life in the 25th century. In this purported paradise, anyone could feel happy at any time, by promptly popping a pill. It was published in 1932, when movies became popular because of the advent of "talking pictures". However, Huxley's creations went to the "feelies", where they could also experience the sensations being displayed on the screen. One of the most popular hits was "The Adventures of the Great White Sperm Whale."

All sorts of sensual pleasures including unlimited sex were readily available. Women never suffered the pain of childbirth, because they were protected from pregnancy and its discomforts. In this somewhat nightmarish Utopia, human reproduction was controlled by the State. While they were being incubated, different classes of citizens were brainwashed to believe that their particular status was superior. Huxley clearly recognized that our happiness often depends on its relativity to the perceived status and happiness of others.

Huxley also lived to see some of his fears come true. In *Brave New World Revisited* written twenty-five years later, he wrote, "a hundred doses of happiness are not enough: send to the drug store for another bottle — and when that is finished, for another. There can be no doubt that if tranquilizers could be bought as easily and cheaply as aspirin, they would be consumed not by the billions, as they are at present, but by the scores and hundreds of billions. And a good cheap stimulant would be almost as popular." This was quickly confirmed as rock stars, athletes, motion picture, and other celebrities with ready access to all sorts of uppers and downers became addicted, or died from overdoses, in vain attempts to achieve a state of sustained happiness. Even if we could feel happy whenever we wanted to with drugs or electrical stimulation of pleasure centers in the brain, would this be advantageous or beneficial? Turning people into contented cows with little interest in self-improvement, or the desire to interact with others, would result in the degeneration of the individual and society.

How Can We Attain Happiness?

All that the Declaration of Independence guarantees is the pursuit of happiness; you have to catch up with it yourself. Advice abounds on how to attain happiness in adages, fables, allegories, quotations, and even songs. "I want to be happy, but I can't be happy, till I make you happy too", according to one. Another advises that "the greatest thing you'll ever learn, is to love, and be loved in return". Many of these anecdotal observations now have solid scientific support. A sense of warm social support and love are powerful contributors to happiness, as well as health. In addition to purposeful work as a means of achieving happiness, Mill emphasized the importance of contributing to the happiness of others. When Freud was asked what makes for a happy life, he replied "*lieben und arbeiten*" — to love and to work. If you don't have love, work alone is a poor substitute, and the reverse is also true. But in order to obtain happiness from work, you must be suited for it, you must be able to

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

derive a feeling of success and pride, and you must avoid doing it to excess, or to the exclusion of social activities that involve others.

Our ancestors were more likely to experience such rewards from their work. Farmers took pride in their crops and livestock. Craftsmen and artisans could often witness the pleasure their carefully hand made products brought to others. Today's jobs are more apt to be major sources of stress and unhappiness. Many workers are merely cogs in some giant technocratic venture, rarely able to demonstrate the full potential of their talents, never having enough time to get the job done to their satisfaction, and having little control over the finished product. Although robbed of the pride of accomplishment our forbears could appreciate, this important source of happiness can be attained through volunteer work, hobbies, and avocations that produce a sense of caring, connectedness, and social support. Whether you are a CEO or a housewife, doing something you enjoy that benefits others, or Selye's "altruistic egotism", leads not only to happiness, but a healthier and longer life.

Happiness depends on how we view ourselves, and the distance between this and our expectations. This gap can be narrowed by changing either one, or both. People traveled great distances to seek advice from The Oracle of Delphi, because his wisdom was so great, he could answer any question, and even predict the future. Carved into the rock over the entrance to his cave, were the words SE SCIO, — "KNOW THYSELF"! As Aldous Huxley similarly advised, "There's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self."

Inappropriate expectations often result from faulty perceptions you can also correct. On a steep roller coaster ride, you may see terrified individuals hunched down in the back who can't wait for the trip in the torture chamber to end, while exhilarated thrill seekers up front race to get on the very next ride. These opposite responses were due to their differences in the feeling of control over the event. While neither group had any more or less control, their perceptions and expectations were quite different. That's something you can learn to change. You can teach people to move from the back of the roller coaster to the front.

There is abundant anecdotal evidence that being happy promotes health and longevity. A sense of caring, connectedness, and social support are powerful stress busters that provide physical as well as emotional rewards. Tending to plants and pets, as well as people, can also be salubrious. Simply petting a dog has been shown to lower blood pressure and heart rate in both the petter

and the pet. Long term studies have now confirmed the beneficial effects of positive emotions on immune system function, and the ability of improved social support to increase longevity in patients with metastatic breast cancer, malignant melanoma, and AIDS. But as the body influences the mind, good health can promote happiness. Thomas Jefferson was careful to acknowledge this in his definition, "Happiness is not being pained in body or troubled in mind." And, John Locke wrote that "A sound mind in a sound body, is a short, but full description of a happy state in this World: he that has these two, has little more to wish for; and he that wants either of them, will be little the better for anything else."

Happiness seems to breed happiness. Having many moments of brief pleasure not only affects mood, appraisal, and expectations, but seems to nudge up our happiness set point. Conversely, being a happy and optimistic person may help to optimize the significance of positive events, and even find benefits from adverse circumstances. ("Things always happen for the best".)

We tend to want to be with happy people, and to avoid those who are unhappy, since these states can be somewhat infectious. The reason misery loves company, may be that unhappy people are lonely because people avoid them. Happy people tend to be enthusiastic, and we like to be around enthusiastic people. The Greeks believed that such individuals were in a state of being inspired by God, and enthusiasm is derived from *éntheos*, (*én*-in the power of, and *theos*-God). In the Coptic religion, priests still breathe into a child's mouth at baptism, so that some ethereal, Divine influence will be inspired, or breathed in.

Getting a more realistic handle on who and where we are, and establishing realistic and worthwhile goals, can help foster the sense of "flow" and inspiration that seems to be such an important aspect of happiness. Correcting faulty perceptions, and developing a positive and optimistic outlook can be of great assistance in this regard, and are well within everyone's power. Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent. Meaningful work and close personal ties are clearly essential ingredients for promoting a sense of sustained happiness and creative living.

There's really nothing new about most of the above. To paraphrase Shakespeare, some are born happy, others achieve happiness, and some have happiness thrust upon them. As succinctly summarized in the ancient Chinese proverb, "Happiness is someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for."

Paul J. Rosch, M.D., F.A.C.P.
Editor

WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

Felicity is a formal term for a feeling of happiness that is not only great, but also sustained. **Gladness** suggests a response to a pleasant event, and while it can be an overflowing emotion, it is usually of shorter duration. **Bliss** is an abundant, more ecstatic and persistent happiness, as in the bliss of young lovers. In its religious sense, bliss implies a great felicity that stems from the submergence of one's self into some divine, spiritual state of infinite nature, such as nirvana in Buddhism. **Blessedness** implies a profound happiness bestowed by a deity, or some extraordinary stroke of good fortune that provides spiritual bliss. **Beatitude** is a more formal term suggesting an even greater degree of supreme blessedness that approaches the transcendent. It is derived from *beatus*, the Latin term for happy. (The Beatitudes are the eight declarations of blessedness in the Sermon on the Mount.) Beatitude is also used as a title or form of address for a patriarch in the Armenian Church, or a metropolitan in the Russian Orthodox religion. In Roman Catholicism, beatification means to exalt someone above all others, and usually to proclaim a deceased person, such as a saint, to be one of the blessed, and thus worthy of worship.

In its broadest sense, happiness signifies an agreeable experience that comes from possessing something that is perceived as good. This could be the **gratification** or **satisfaction** of some longing or hope, or being rid of something distressful. Gratification suggests relief from some mental or physical desire. Satisfaction is providing such a desire all that it may crave. **Comfort** implies a sense of **security** and **well-being**, and may also represent relief from something disagreeable. Comfort is provided by the sympathy of others following the death of a loved one, or a warm fireplace on a cold wintry night.

Enjoyment is much more positive, and implies something that makes us **delighted**. Someone who is sick may find comfort in being relieved of pain, but this is very far from the state of enjoyment. **Pleasure** is even more vivid, and usually arises from the stimulation of the senses by some enjoyable activity. Satisfaction is more **tranquil** than pleasure, and to some extent, when pleasure passes, satisfaction remains. Gratification often implies a mild form of happiness, usually from some incident that is really not extremely important, while satisfaction connotes a deeper happiness which is more complete and abiding. Happiness is more positive than either comfort, enjoyment or satisfaction, and more serene and rational than pleasure. Pleasure is always transient, happiness is abiding.

We often speak of pleasures, but rarely use the plural of happiness. People may refer to vicious pleasures or delights that are immoral, but not vicious happiness. **Joy** is more intense than happiness, deeper than gladness, and more enduring than pleasure. **Triumph** is a joy that results from victory, success, or achievement. **Gaiety** is more superficial than joy, and more transient than gladness, and is expressed in **merriment** and **mirth**. **Rejoicing**, **jubilation**, and **exultation** usually imply the joy and happiness of more than one person, and are expressed in words, song, or activities. **Glee** is less outward than joy or delight, and while it can represent an overflowing type of happiness, it is also somewhat transient. **Ecstasy** is a feeling of extreme or extravagant delight. **Rapture** is closely related to ecstasy, but is more an expression of a state of joyous exultation. **Eudemonia** is the word Aristotle used to describe a complete state of true happiness and well-being. However, it implies a rational and ethical type of satisfaction, rather than the self-gratification that results from hedonistic indulgence in sensual pleasures.

Synonyms for other aspects of happiness include: blitheness, buoyancy, cheerfulness, delight, gayness, good or high spirits, light-hearted, elation, enchantment, enjoyment, exhilaration, fulfillment, joviality, peace, and serenity. Happy people are also often described as being animated, beaming, carefree, debonair, devil-may-care, easy going, pleased as punch, satiated, smiling, spirited, sprightly, starry-eyed, sunny, tickled pink, upbeat, well-pleased, on cloud nine, on top of the world, living in the lap of luxury, living the life of Riley, or in hog heaven. You can be happy as a king, happy as a lark, happy as the day is long, happy as a pig in muck (or something else), and snug as a bug in a rug. Paradise, Eden, Utopia, Elysium, Arcadia, or heaven, and especially the Seventh Heaven, imply being in a place of more prolonged happiness.

ISSN # 1089-148X

HEALTH AND STRESS

*The Newsletter of
The American Institute of Stress*

124 Park Ave., Yonkers, New York 10703

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Yonkers, NY
Permit No. 400