



# How to get happy

Need some more of the feel-good factor in your life?  
Read on as **Pearl Bates** spills the beans

What is happiness? When I researched this question, and put it to some friends and colleagues, the definitions that I got back were many and varied. But one thing people seemed to agree on was that happiness is a good thing to have.

"We have not got proof," says Mike Rudin, producer of the BBC series *The Happiness Formula*, "but scientific research suggests happiness leads to long life, health, resilience and good performance." Happy people are energising and inspiring to be around. They are more productive, have fewer sick days, are nicer to be with and make for a happier workplace. This 'happiness' thing seems to have almost magical qualities – no wonder we all want more of it!

So how do we go about cultivating happiness in our lives? There are lots of ideas about how to go about getting yourself happy, but the following areas have repeatedly come up as being important ones to focus on when it comes to upping your quota of the feel-good factor that is happiness.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Want to know one of the major secrets to happiness? The answer is people. Countless studies, including large-scale surveys carried out by the likes of the University of Chicago's

National Opinion Research Centre, conclude that people who have a minimum of five close friends are 50% more likely to describe themselves as 'very happy'. So it makes sense to prioritise your time with your friends and really invest in them – and remember email, texts and calls from the mobile don't count! Genuine connection is what it takes, so that when you are alone you still feel enfolded and loved. Throw parties, make lunch dates and try to be completely present when you are with people, giving them your undivided attention, and letting them know that they really count. This also goes for family, neighbours, lovers, children and even pets!

## SECURITY AND MONEY

Keep in mind that happiness is mostly dependant on our state of mind, not on our status or the state of our bank account. Peter Ubel, a professor of medicine at the University of Michigan, says, "The relationship between money and happiness is pretty darned small."

Diana Pidwell, a community and clinical psychologist at Blackpool Wyre and Fyde Community NHS Trust, agrees that money cannot buy happiness. "Many studies have been done on the importance, or otherwise, of money," she says. "What seems to be the consensus is that once you have the basic level then, after that, it does not make any difference to happiness."

In most cases, if a person is handed £10, the pleasure centres in their head will light up as if they were given food, sex or drugs, but this initial rush will soon wear off. That's not to say that money doesn't matter at all. People who have experienced poverty get happier when their financial outlook improves, according to survey results, and this could be that more money relieves them from negative circumstances and brings more status. The important thing seems to be that you have enough to give yourself a sense of stability and security.

## SPIRITUALITY

Belief in God, or something bigger than yourself, that raises you up above the everyday, material world, can have an enormous bearing on your happiness levels, helping you to keep a healthy perspective on your life and life events. Spirituality is different from organised religion, and can take whatever form feels comfortable to you. Debbie Mandel, a stress-management specialist, radio show host and author, has a few tips on how to get spiritual now: "Synchronise with nature and its energy. Leave your head and get into your heart. Be receptive to the revelations in what you dream about, or what your eye is drawn to. Believe in your intuition and act on it. Discover your creativity and implement it. Enjoy helping others, and cut them some slack. Don't beat yourself with guilt or regret. Create time and space for yourself." You might also try writing in a journal, recording each day the things you are grateful for.

## ATTITUDE

Barring extreme circumstances, our level of wellbeing is determined by what we choose to focus on (the full or empty part of the glass.) "Happiness is an attitude," says artist