



# GET HAPPY!

RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT HAPPINESS HAS MANY PRACTICAL BENEFITS. KATHERINE COWAN INTRODUCES FOUR WAYS TO FIND HAPPY  
ILLUSTRATION MILENA GALLI

What does “happiness” mean to you? Are you happy with who you are and what you’re doing? Do your circumstances need to change, or do you just need to change the way you view them? Evidence from positive psychology research, which explores human strengths, suggests that we all have scope to improve our levels of happiness. Recent research from University College London suggests being happy might even help us live longer. Happy people are more resilient and better equipped to manage and implement change than those who are unhappy. Let’s focus on four components of happiness, and see what they mean to you: gratitude, goals, strengths and optimism.

## WHAT ARE YOU GRATEFUL FOR?

Stop for a moment and think about the things around you for which you feel grateful. Studies of gratitude have shown that people who take time to “count their blessings”, or savour positive experiences, are likely to feel more optimistic, energetic and satisfied with their lives.

### » TRY THIS:

For one week, every night before you go to bed, write down three good things that have gone well that day. Perhaps you made a lovely meal, or did well at work. Maybe your journey home was hassle-free. It doesn’t have to be momentous. For each one, think about what made that good thing happen. Notice any patterns or themes? How do you feel by the end of the week? Human beings have a natural tendency to focus on the negative. This exercise is a good way to bring our focus back to what’s going well for us, and the role we play in making that happen.

## HAVE YOU SET THE RIGHT GOALS?

Setting goals can increase your motivation and wellbeing. But they need to be the right goals – ones which reflect your intrinsic values. The way you frame your goals will affect how you feel about them. Avoidance goals (“I’ll try not to make a fool of myself”) can cause anxiety and demotivation, whereas approach goals (“I’ll create a good impression”) generate positive feelings, increasing your chances of success.

### » TRY THIS:

Imagine it’s the end of your life. What do you want your legacy to be? How will you want people to remember you? How would you summarise your values and achievements? Write it all down, then re-read it, identifying what really matters to you. What are the goals you need to be setting and what do you need to be doing now to start striving towards them?

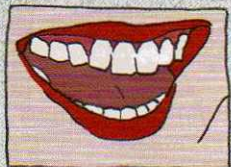
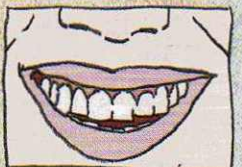
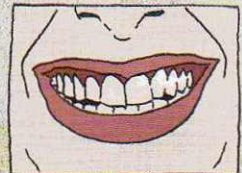
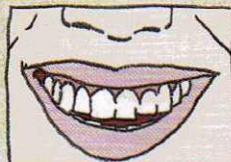
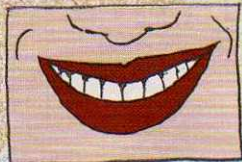
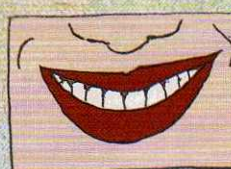
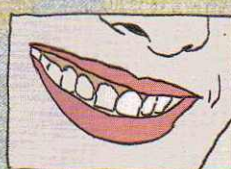
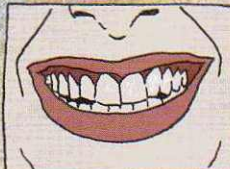
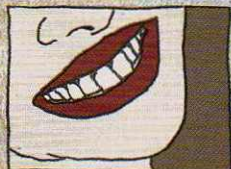
## DO YOU KNOW YOUR OWN STRENGTHS?

Knowing and following your strengths, both at work and in life, not only helps you function and perform to the best of your ability; it can also make you feel more focused, energised and fulfilled.

### » TRY THIS:

There are several credible, evidence-based tools on the internet to help you work out your strengths, including StrengthsFinder, StrengthsScope and Realise2. One which is free, and part of an ongoing research programme into strengths, is the VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues (viacharacter.org). You can do their questionnaire, or have a look at their list of strengths, which they believe we all have to varying degrees. Select the ones which resonate the most with you. How do you currently use them? How do they serve you? How can you use them in new ways?





### HOW OPTIMISTIC DO YOU FEEL?

Optimists are motivated, are confident about achieving their goals and will persevere in the face of setbacks – all traits which contribute to high morale. Evidence suggests that optimists are more resilient than pessimists, and are better equipped to withstand stress and trauma. It's worth getting into a habit of optimism, especially when approaching change.

#### » TRY THIS:

How would you describe your best possible self? Take some time to think about what you want your life to look like in one, five, 10 or even 20 years' time. Visualise a bright future in which you've worked hard, done your best, achieved your goals and in which things have turned out how you wanted. Now, write down what you've imagined. If you find it

hard, repeat the process until it comes more easily to you. There is empirical evidence to show that this exercise cultivates optimism and enhances well-being.

### FURTHER READING

For other exercises and more on positive psychology and the science of happiness:

- The How of Happiness, Sonja Lybomirsky (Piatkus, 2007)
- Happier: Can you Learn to be Happy?, Tal Ben-Shahar (McGraw Hill, 2008)



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