

What is, and how can you achieve happiness?

**The Seven Most Commonly Asked Questions
About Happiness and Answers from Dr. Happy.**

A special report from

THE HAPPINESS INSTITÜTE

www.thehappinessinstitute.com

Dr. Timothy Sharp 2005 ©

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Introduction

Many people over the years have claimed to have found **the secrets to happiness**. And many of these have made lots of money selling products and services which have not always proven to be of great benefit. Not many of them, however, have had any sort of formal training in the understanding of human thinking and behaviour.

Before founding The Happiness Institute I spent approximately **15 years studying psychology and completing three degrees**. I've written two books and several research papers. I've treated over 1,000 individuals with common problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, insomnia and all sorts of chronic, sometimes terminal, health problems. I've also worked with numerous organisations helping them manage and maximise the productivity of their staff.

I can honestly say that I know what makes people distressed but just as importantly, I've also learned what makes people happy.

Not many others have had the education, training and experience that I have and I'm proud to say that I'm now at the forefront of the exciting, new "positive psychology" movement.

What's in this special report?

Firstly, why is this report "special"? Quite simply, this is special because **it will help you understand what happiness is and most importantly, how you can achieve it.**

It will help you more fully understand how you can define your own version of happiness and how you can set about living it. It will, to cut straight to the chase and show you what you can do to have a better life.

Based on more than a decade's experience, and taking in to account the hundreds of interviews and discussions I've had over the years, I've identified **the 7 most common questions about happiness.**

This special report lists each of these questions and provides an answer based on my years of experience and incorporating decades of scientific research.

When you understand the answers to these questions and when **apply them consistently in your own life** you'll not just be happier, but also healthier, more motivated, more focused and therefore more successful.

1. What is happiness?

Happiness means different things to different people but for me, happiness is a term that covers a range of positive emotions. As humans, we experience a wide array of moods and feelings including “negative” ones (such as depression, frustration, anxiety etcetera) and “positive” ones (such as satisfaction, joy and happiness).

In my opinion, happiness is something that encompasses all of the positive emotions from what I call the “low arousal” ones such as contentment, calm and satisfaction, through to the “high arousal” ones such as joy and excitement.

It’s important to note, that none of these emotions are necessarily better or worse than any others but that some people will definitely tend more towards some than others.

Although not exclusively, “extroverts” tend to seek out and experience more of the high arousal positive emotions while “introverts” tend to seek out and experience more of the lower arousal positive emotions.

Happiness, then, is a positive state of wellbeing characterised by these positive emotions.

2. Should happiness come naturally?

The simple answer to this question is yes, if you're lucky but no, if you're like most people.

That is, for some people happiness does come naturally and easily in the same way that for some people, other skills or abilities (such as athletics and sports, problem solving, and even interpersonal relationships) come easily.

For many people, however, whether it comes naturally or not is irrelevant. If you want to achieve greater happiness then you can – if you find out what to do and do it (and then practice it until you master it).

Consider the following example: how many of you were born able to drive a car? I bet the answer is “none of you”.

Despite this, because it's something that can make our lives easier to manage, most of us put in the effort to learn how to drive and then we practice until we're good enough to do it easily.

Happiness can be viewed in much the same way. If achieving happiness is important to you then whether it comes naturally or easily or not need not stop you from (1) finding out what to do and then (2) practicing it until you're really good at it.

3. Why is happiness so hard for us in this day and age that many of us have to take lessons on how to be happy?

Happiness is hard for many people to achieve because they focus on the wrong variables or they've not been taught the right things to do!

Despite what many newspapers, glossy magazines, Hollywood movies and TV shows would have us believe, happiness does NOT come from wealth or income, or even material possessions such as fast cars or large, plasma TV screens.

Nor is happiness directly associated with physical attractiveness or even intelligence. And believe it or not, happiness does not depend on the type of cola you drink, the type of jeans you wear or even the model of mobile phone you use!

Happiness is, unfortunately, very misunderstood and as a result, many people see it as elusive.

But happiness need not be elusive if it's sought in an appropriate and realistic way. As we say at [The Happiness Institute](http://www.thehappinessinstitute.com), achieving happiness requires nothing more than practicing a few simple disciplines on a daily basis.

Taking lessons in, or seeking help attaining happiness is not necessarily an indication of something problematic or of failure – no more so than needing to

see an accountant for assistance with your financial or tax issues, a lawyer for help with legal issues or even a dentist for help maintaining the health of your teeth!

Seeking help for, and taking lessons in happiness is simply an indication that for whatever reason, you've not adequately learned the skills and disciplines that lead to happiness.

And just like you can get help learning to drive from a family member (e.g. your mother or father), a friend, or a professional; so too can you learn to be happier from a family member, friend or from a professional (such as the [coaches](#) at The Happiness Institute).

Taking lessons in or attending courses that are designed to enhance happiness should, therefore, be seen as positive things to do. After all, these lessons will lead to improved health, better relationships and all manner of other positive outcomes.

4. So how do I become happier?

At The Happiness Institute we believe first, that life's too short not to be happy; and second, that achieving happiness requires nothing more than practicing a few simple disciplines every day.

Accordingly, becoming happier requires first, a commitment to making happiness a priority; and second, a willingness to learn, practice and ultimately master the key "disciplines" associated with happiness.

Let's consider each in turn.

First, ask yourself whether happiness really is a priority for you at this point in time? Are you really doing all you can to live a happy life? Could you be doing any more to live a happy and fulfilling life?

If you believe you could be doing more or that you could make some improvements then carefully assess the pros and cons of doing so. Now the pros of making positive changes are pretty obvious, and you might think there aren't any "cons" but think carefully.

Living a happier life might, among other things, require changes (small or large) to your career, to your relationships, to your financial arrangements and/or to the way you act on your health.

Trying to become happier at work, for example, may (in the short-term, anyway) require financial

adjustments, learning new skills and growing a new professional network.

Think carefully about this because doing so will save you time later and provide you with the motivation to really do what you need to do.

Following this, determine which of the following strategies are most important to you and make sure you dedicate time on a regular basis to mastering the relevant skills.

(a) **Clarify your life direction and goals.**

There's no doubt that happy people are clearer about who they are and where they want to go (what they want to achieve).

(b) **Live a healthy life.** It's hard to be happy if you are, literally, sick and tired all the time. So ensure you eat well, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep and rest.

(c) **Don't tolerate negative thoughts.** Unhelpful and self-defeating thoughts are the enemy of happiness. Learn how to control your mind and especially, how to identify and challenge worrying, pessimistic thoughts.

(d) **Plant optimistic thoughts.** Happy people look at the world differently. They

focus more on positives and they look for opportunities in all situations (even challenging ones). So once you've weeded out the unhappy thoughts, work on planting optimistic ones.

- (e) **Foster, develop and maintain key relationships.** Research strongly suggests that happy people have both more and better quality relationships. And to achieve this they spend more time working on the quality of these relationships. So don't take the important people in your life for granted. Make sure you devote enough time to reasonably keep them flowering.
- (f) **Focus on your strengths.** Although we can always try to improve and although we can all try to fix our weaknesses, happy people tend to be far more aware of, and far better at utilising their core strengths, qualities and attributes. So find out what you're good at and find ways to do more of this as often as possible.
- (g) **Live in the moment.** Happiness is not something you'll ever achieve in the future. It won't come when you have more, or when you've reached a goal, or when you're older, wiser, richer etc. Happiness can only ever be experienced

at one point in time – and that's now. Happy people spend less time dwelling on the past, and worrying about the future, and more time living in the here and now.

- (h) **Enjoy the moment.** Slightly different to the point above, happiness is not just living in the moment but also, enjoying the moment. Happy people are more grateful. They appreciate what they have, and think less about what they don't have. Often times they appreciate small things other people don't even notice. Some times they're happy just because!

5. If I do all that will I be happy all the time?

Let me respond to this with an emphatic, no!

I must admit I get asked this question, or similar questions a lot and I frequently find myself emphasising that even the happiest people experience negative emotions at times.

This is appropriate and normal!

Many argue that you can't see the light if you've not seen the darkness. This doesn't mean you need to have suffered depression in order to be happy but it is certainly my experience that the light looks brighter and more enjoyable after coming out of the dark.

And let me emphasise an important point one more time. It is perfectly normal, healthy and appropriate to experience the full range of human emotions, including the so-called "negative ones".

If you never experience frustration or anger; if you never experience anxiety or stress; if you never, ever feel sad, down or remorseful, then there would, quite simply, be something wrong with you.

So, remember, practicing all of the strategies we recommend at The Happiness Institute will not necessarily lead to you feeling absolutely ecstatic, 100% of the time (if you were, then you might actually be experiencing a form of mania which is just as

troubling and just as problematic as serious depression!).

Rather, practicing the happiness skills and strategies will allow you to experience more positive emotions, more often.

And these skills and strategies will also help you to bounce back from difficult situations faster, as well as to manage negative emotions more effectively.

It is critical, therefore, to have realistic expectations when seeking happiness and the reality is that although you can feel better more often and feel down less often, it is unrealistic to expect to feel happy all the time.

6. How do I make the people around me as happy as I am?

You can't!

Happiness is something each and every one of us chooses (or doesn't choose). And we can't make that choice for other people.

If you review the strategies outlined in the answer to question 4, it's easy to see that these are things we can only do to and for ourselves.

No one else can tell us what goals to set (and if they do, you'll not really be motivated to achieve them). No one else can exercise, eat, sleep or rest for us. No one else can think for us (positively or negatively) and no one else can know or use our strengths. Finally, no one else can live for us, at any point in time, and especially in the present moment.

So, the bottom line then, is to live your life as best you can, to be as happy as you can, and as much as possible to set a good example for those around you.

Indirectly, then, this is the only way you can possibly influence others and help them to be happier. You can model for them the key strategies and encourage them to try them for themselves.

More than this, you can (if they ask) provide them with appropriate information (such as this Special Report) and/or appropriate and helpful resources such as The Happiness Institute's books and workbooks – available at our website:

www.thehappinessinstitute.com/products.

But please note: you can't "force" someone to be happy. You can't force them to read any material or listen to any CDs.

Unless they want to be happy, unless they express an interest in doing what you're doing and experiencing what you're experiencing, you'll only frustrate yourself, and possibly them, by trying to get them to do what they're not ready or able to do.

So focus on yourself and your own happiness and hope and trust that others will follow on this wonderful journey to a happy now.

7. How do you balance the desire to achieve with living in the moment?

This is a fascinating and important question because as noted above, happy people are people who set clear goals. They're also people who tend to plan ahead and manage their time well and (although not mentioned specifically above) are more active.

In summary, happy people tend to do more and they tend to achieve more.

But, and at the risk of repeating myself, happy people are also people who spend more time living in the moment. They live in the here and now, not in the past or in the future.

How do we reconcile these facts?

Well, to begin with it's important to differentiate between planning for the future and worrying about the future. It's also important to differentiate between dwelling in the past, and learning from the past.

Happy and successful people are able to do this and the concept of this balancing act is brilliantly summed up in the following quote (from Spencer Johnson's wonderful little book, "The Present"):

The Present

Three ways to use your present moments.

Be in the present

*When you want to be happy and successful,
focus on what is right now.*

Use your purpose to respond to what is important now.

Learn from the past

*When you want to make the present better than the
past, look at what happened in the past.*

Learn something valuable from it.

Do things differently in the present.

Plan for the future

*When you want to make the future better than the
present, see what a wonderful future would look like.*

Make plans to help it happen.

Put your plan into action in the present.

So now it's up to you!

I hope you've learned something from this special report. At the very least, I hope you've learned that happiness can be defined and more so, it can be yours.

Happiness need not be elusive!

You can have a better life and I hope this report provides you with some motivation to take positive action; because **information and knowledge are not much use if they're not applied.**

Reading this report and then doing nothing is almost worse than not even reading it – because if you do nothing you've just wasted the last 15 minutes or so.

So please, for your own benefit and for the benefit of those who love you – **do something, now!**

If you do nothing else, then sign up for our free eNewsletter which includes happiness tips, quotes, book reviews and articles summarising the latest positive psychology research. If I do say so, **it's a great monthly read.**

Sign up in the relevant box on our home page at:

www.thehappinessinstitute.com.

You might also be interested in participating, at no cost, in The Happiness Institute's "Happy Club". This is an online "club", otherwise known as a "forum" or message-board.

Basically, it's a place where anyone, any time, can go and ask questions or post ideas about how to be happier. You can also respond to other people's postings and have an online "discussion".

Check it out at www.thehappinessinstitute.com/forum.

And one more thing, join in the Institute's "blog" discussion. The blog is somewhere where I, Dr. Sharp, post articles and reports and where you can reply and/or make comments.

It's very easy to use. Check it out by clicking here: www.thehappinessinstitute.com/weblog.

THE HAPPINESS INSTITÜTE

The Happiness Institute was established in 2003 with the specific intention of making individuals, couples, families and organisations happier.

Based on my years of experience I've developed a range of services and products specifically designed to address the issues described above. You can find out more about our coaching services at www.thehappinessinstitute.com/events (including our 90 day online happiness program) but the most relevant solution to the aforementioned issues are our unique and specially designed happiness workbooks.

These address themes such as clarifying your life goals, optimistic thinking, identifying and utilising your strengths and building happy relationships.

And we know they work. Here are some comments clients and participants of our courses have made:

"They have really honed in on the essential elements required for finding one's happiness and the programs provide practical and effective advice on how to apply these elements...I've always come away from the sessions feeling very positive...One hour sessions that provide a lifetime of value."

And here's what one of the happy readers of our workbooks said:

"They are FANTASTIC; a really excellent resource. I want to send one to umpteen friends and family also. Congratulations on a great format, concept and writing style. They are just the right size, level of information, professional and credible, yet digestible. I think you have really created something worthwhile and effective."

So if you'd like our help to learn the CHOOSE strategies described in our workbooks and taught in our programs, and if you want to live a happier life, visit our website and view our "products" section (www.thehappinessinstitute.com/products).