

Money won't buy you happiness

David G. Myers

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Happiness is not just for the rich, famous and young. According to new research on psychological wellbeing, having a sense of personal control, close relationships and support and meaning from one's culture, faith and work will improve a person's chance of happiness and satisfaction in life more than money and youth.

The seeming simplicity of the formula may provide hope for clients who have in the past used alcohol and other drugs to achieve happiness -- and discovered that it didn't work.

Happy people have these traits in common: self-esteem, a sense of personal control, optimism and extraversion, says psychologist David G. Myers, Phd.

"Happy people tend to like themselves, feel like they're in control of their lives, take on new challenges and believe they will succeed, and, finally, are happy both when alone and with other people," says Myers, a psychology professor at Hope College in Michigan.

People of any income, age, sex or race can be happy, according to the last 14 years of research on happiness

Happy people are more likely to have close relationships, Myers says. From more than 800 studies reviewed for his book *The Pursuit of Happiness: Who Is Happy -- And Why?*, nine out of 10 people said that the "most significant alternative to aloneness is marriage."

"It has been said that a bad marriage is more depressing to a woman than a man, but the myth that single women report greater satisfaction than married women has not been supported," Myers says. "Through out the Western world, married people of both sexes report more happiness than those never married, divorced or separated."

Involvement in interesting activities, whether they be work or hobbies, is also a major source of wellbeing, according to Myers.

Having a spiritual side seems to have an effect on one's happiness too. Surveys in the United States and in 14 other Western nations have found that "people were happier and more satisfied with their lives if they believed in a religious faith and frequently attended a place of worship."

Why doesn't money buy happiness? Money buys comfort according to Myers, "and once people are able to afford life's necessities, increasing levels of affluence matter surprisingly little. Wealth is like health: Its absence can breed misery, yet having it is no guarantee of happiness."

It seems that external events, like winning the lottery or having a near tragic accident, have temporary effects on well-being, Myers says.

"Most lottery winners only have a temporary jolt of joy," he says. "And people who are disabled usually report a near-normal level of well-being after a period of time."

"Objective life circumstances have a negligible role to play in a theory of happiness," according to one of the studies in the research, "and satisfaction is less a matter getting what you want than wanting what you have."

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