

# What Is Happiness, Anyway?

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<https://www.happify.com/hd/what-is-happiness-anyway/>



What is happiness? People have agonized over this question for centuries, but only recently has science begun to weigh in on the debate. Before I get into what the science has concluded, let me start by giving some answers to a somewhat easier question: what isn't happiness?

## Happiness Is Not: Feeling Good All The Time

Skeptics have often asked whether a person who uses cocaine every day is “happy.” If feeling good all the time were our only requirement, then the answer would be “yes.” However, recent research suggests that an even-keeled mood is more psychologically healthy than a mood in which you achieve great heights of happiness regularly—after all, what goes up must come down. Furthermore, when you ask people what makes their lives worth living, they rarely say anything about their mood. They are more likely to cite things that they find meaningful, such as their work or relationships. Recent research even suggests that if you focus too much on trying to feel good all the time, you'll actually undermine your ability to feel good at all—in other words, no amount of feeling good will be satisfying to you, since what you expect (all the time) isn't physically possible for most people.

## **Happiness Is Not: Being Rich or Affording Everything You Want**

While living below the poverty line certainly makes it hard to be happy, beyond that, money does not appear to buy happiness. Imagine you unexpectedly get a \$10,000/year raise. While you would certainly be excited in the short term, it would only be a matter of time before your expectations change to fit your new budget. Before you know it, you're just as happy as you were before the raise! This holds true for new houses, new cars, new gadgets, and all of the other material goods that people spend so much time pining for. The only exception to this rule is when you spend your money on experiences with other people so you took that extra \$10,000/year and spent it on some weekend getaways to new and exciting places with your friends or family, then you might get happier. However, this is rarely how people choose to spend windfalls.

## **Happiness Is Not: A Final Destination**

The old adage, “Are we there yet?” is often applied to discussions of happiness, as if a person works towards happiness and one day “arrives.” Contrary to popular belief, however, unless you are one of the few who won the genetic lottery and are naturally happy, it takes regular effort to maintain happiness. Most established techniques for becoming happier—keeping a gratitude journal, for example—are habits, not one-shot events, and most life events that make us happy in the short-term, like getting married or being promoted, fade over time as we adapt to them.

## **So, What IS Happiness?**

The research suggests that happiness is a combination of how satisfied you are with your life (for example, finding meaning in your work) and how good you feel on a day-to-day basis. Both of these are relatively stable—that is, our life changes, and our mood fluctuates, but our general happiness is more genetically determined than anything else. The good news is, with consistent effort, this can be offset. Think of it like you think about weight: if you eat how you want to and are as active as you want to be, your body will settle at a certain weight. But if you eat less than you'd like or exercise more, your weight will adjust accordingly. If that new diet or exercise regimen becomes part of your everyday life, then you'll stay at this new weight. If you go back to eating and exercising the way you used to, your weight will return to where it started. So it goes, too, with happiness.

In other words, you have the ability to control how you feel—and with consistent practice, you can form life-long habits for a more satisfying and fulfilling life.

## Questions

1. What is your opinion about this article? Would a lot of money or reaching goals make you feel a little happier?
2. If happiness is a 'state of mind' as the article suggests, how do we know we have it? Life is complicated and challenging. Sometimes it is difficult to know what we feel. Or no?