



“Lasting Happiness

...comes from doing things that are internally fulfilling, meaningful and tend to be diverse.”

—Dr. Tayyab Rashid

THERE'S A FAMOUS HARVARD STUDY ABOUT happiness. The 80-year study – one of the longest in history – found that men who lived the longest and healthiest lives didn't have the most money or the best genes; they were those who had the best relationships with others. In effect, those who were the healthiest and lived the longest were also the happiest. Of course, other lifestyle factors, such as smoking and alcohol consumption, played important roles as well, but the researchers concluded that satisfaction with relationships and life were good predictors of healthy aging.

Studies show that well-being is associated with multiple health factors, including healthy immune system function, cardiovascular health and a decreased risk of dying. “The overwhelming consensus in research is that happiness and positive emotions have some definite physical benefits,” says Dr. Tayyab Rashid, a clinical psychologist in Toronto. “But it's not a chicken-and-egg quandary. The arrow is from happiness toward health, not

from health toward happiness.”

So, how do you get to that happy, healthy place? Some things might boost your mood temporarily, like a glass of wine or a mind-numbing reality show. But while it's OK to enjoy a few guilty pleasures, that kind of joy doesn't stick around for long. “Lasting happiness comes from doing things that are internally fulfilling, meaningful and tend to be diverse,” says Dr. Rashid. To find a true sense of purpose or meaning, you need to do things beyond yourself. From volunteering to making charitable donations, contributing both your time and money to others is shown to have health benefits. One study out of the University of British Columbia found that when people were given money but had to spend it on others, the participants were happier than those who were given cash to spend on themselves.

Still feeling blue? Ask yourself, When was the last time you laughed? When was the last time you felt a deep sense of meaning? When was the last time you felt so much joy that you couldn't describe it in words? Dr. Rashid says that going back to those moments and thinking about what elements you enjoyed can repair a bad mood and act as inspiration for the types of things that lead to self-fulfillment.

Dr. Rashid recommends looking for “islands of happiness” in your life. Sure, it might be a dark and rainy day outside, but perhaps you spot a beautiful bird outside your window or get to enjoy your favourite cup of tea. He suggests starting a daily gratitude journal so that you'll be motivated to look for those little tidbits of happiness.

He also recommends finding and focusing on your strengths. “We spend far more time thinking about what's wrong with us and with others than what is right with us and with others,” he says. “Happiness is using your strengths in an adaptive, situationally relevant way.” For example, if one of your strengths is curiosity, ask yourself how something you're doing can benefit from that strength and try to apply it better to your life.

And remember that Harvard study on longevity? “Good relationships keep us happier and healthier,” says Robert Waldinger, director of the study, in his popular TED Talk. “The people who were most satisfied in their relationships at 50 were healthiest at 80. Good, close relationships seem to buffer us from some of the slings and arrows of getting old.”

Dedicate quality time to your family, friends and community members. Your life (and ultimately your health) depends on it. *hr*