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PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

The art of happiness

It's safe to say most people want to be happy beyond their few days of vacation or a chuckle or two with a friend, and wonder how they can improve their overall level of joy.

A lot of helpful research has been conducted on the psychology of happiness in the past 50 years, and researchers now believe that our outlook and life choices account for 40 per cent of our happiness. Not surprisingly, it's our relationships, work and participation in our communities that have the most impact, while only 10 per cent of our happiness is believed to come from our external circumstances such as rainy days or traffic jams. So, how can we take charge and improve our levels of happiness in day-to-day life?

Evaluate your thought patterns: Do you worry compulsively, self-criticize or dwell on the past? Listen to yourself and try to avoid negativity in both your thoughts and actions. Work hard to be positive and forward-looking in all that you do.

Get busy and stay focused: Sure-fire ways that have been shown to increase happiness are dancing, exercising, volunteering, smiling, laughing and hugging your loved ones. Studies also suggest that a wandering mind can contribute to unhappiness, so focusing on the task at hand can boost your level of joy.

Eat chocolate: The neuroactive alkaloids in chocolate have been shown to enhance contentment as they tend to produce a kind of euphoria in the brain.

Be nice: Performing random acts of kindness increases short-term feelings of happiness. But the most powerful way to increase your long-term contentment is to understand your talents and work on sharing those parts of yourself with others. Happiness is a continuous cycle; making others happy will make you happy, and vice versa.

Consider the rewards: Why take the time and effort needed to be happy, you might ask? Well, studies suggest that happy people tend to earn more money than their unhappy counterparts, have better relationships and bounce back more easily from bad experiences. They also produce up to 50 per cent more antibodies, have lower stress hormones and are generally healthier.

There is simply no reason not to be happy. So when you've finished reading through this issue of *Caregiver Solutions*, don't forget to take a few moments to think happy thoughts.



Caroline Tapp-McDougall
Publisher

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