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How to Find True Happiness

So often we think we'll be happier if only we lose 10 pounds or make more money. Why wait until then? Discover how to **feel your best** right now.

YOU HAVE THE POWER to be happy—really, truly happy—today. That's the word from a growing group of researchers, psychologists, and life coaches devoted to unlocking the secrets of happiness.

True happiness, they say, is much more than a smile on your face. It's a way of looking at the world. Let's say you lock yourself out of the house. If you're happy, experts explain, you won't scold yourself, kick the door, and fret that your

day is ruined. Instead, you'll spring into action. You'll make a mental list of neighbors or friends who have a spare key, or you'll call a locksmith. As you wait for help to arrive, you'll use the newfound free time to read the paper on your doorstep or enjoy a cup of tea at the café down the street.

"Happy people are far more focused on the little victories and miracles than the problems," says Dan Baker, Ph.D., medical psychologist at Canyon Ranch Health Resort in Tucson, Ariz., and author >>

BY ERIN O'DONNELL

of *What Happy People Know* (Rodale, 2003). Instead of getting caught up in fear and worry, they see the good possibilities in each situation. They have confidence in their ability to cope, and they live with a sense of purpose.

And this state of mind can be yours even if you're currently frustrated with your life, you're normally a little cranky, or you come from a long line of pessimists. It's as simple as adopting the following six habits.

Don't Pin Your Hopes on the Lottery

Ask most of us what would make us happy, and chances are we'll name a change in our circumstances: We'll be happy when we win the lottery, get a better job, or see a smaller number when we step on the scale. "In our society, we tend to believe that happiness is something that comes from the



outside, that happens to us," says William Fleeson, Ph.D., a psychology professor who studies happiness at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. In reality, happiness comes from within and depends on how you think about your life.

Sure, external events and material objects like a new car or a bigger paycheck can give you a rush. But those feelings don't last. As proof, Baker describes a poll that once asked people about their perceptions of wealth. Poll-

a way of looking at the world that made them happy despite their difficult circumstances. Like them, you can tweak your outlook so that you feel self-confident and serene whether or not you get that raise, win the lottery, or lose that weight, Baker says.

Seek Stillness in Your Slippers

Start by adopting this habit: Spend a few minutes being both alone and

"Happiness is in the nuances," says life coach Rhonda Britten. You'll tap a limitless source of joy if you notice the nuances and relish them.

sters asked those who made \$10,000 a year what salary would make them feel wealthy. They said \$50,000. Pollsters then asked people who made \$50,000 what amount would make them feel wealthy, and they said \$200,000. Those who made \$200,000 said they'd need to make millions, and so on. Money will never bring lasting contentment, Baker says. We're hard-wired to fear scarcity, so we'll never be completely satisfied with what we have. For that reason, you need to look elsewhere for true happiness, Baker says.

And he offers further proof of just how little your circumstances matter: Researchers once compared lottery winners to average people and to those who suffered accidents that rendered them paraplegic. Believe it or not, the paraplegic people were happiest. Over time they developed

quiet every day. The realities of modern life normally keep you buzzing with distracting mental chatter, says Suzanne Willis Zoglio, Ph.D., a life coach in Doylestown, Pa., who wrote *Create a Life that Tingles Your Soul* (Tower Hill Press, 2000). You're thinking about what you need to do today, what you should have said five minutes ago, or that tough phone call you're dreading tomorrow. Quiet time allows you to cut through that noise to find out what really matters to you, Zoglio says.

You may think you just don't have the time. But the experts disagree. "Here's a news flash: You have the same amount of time in your day as the wisest person in the world," Baker says. "It's all about your priorities." Zoglio suggests that you set

Why Happy Is Healthy

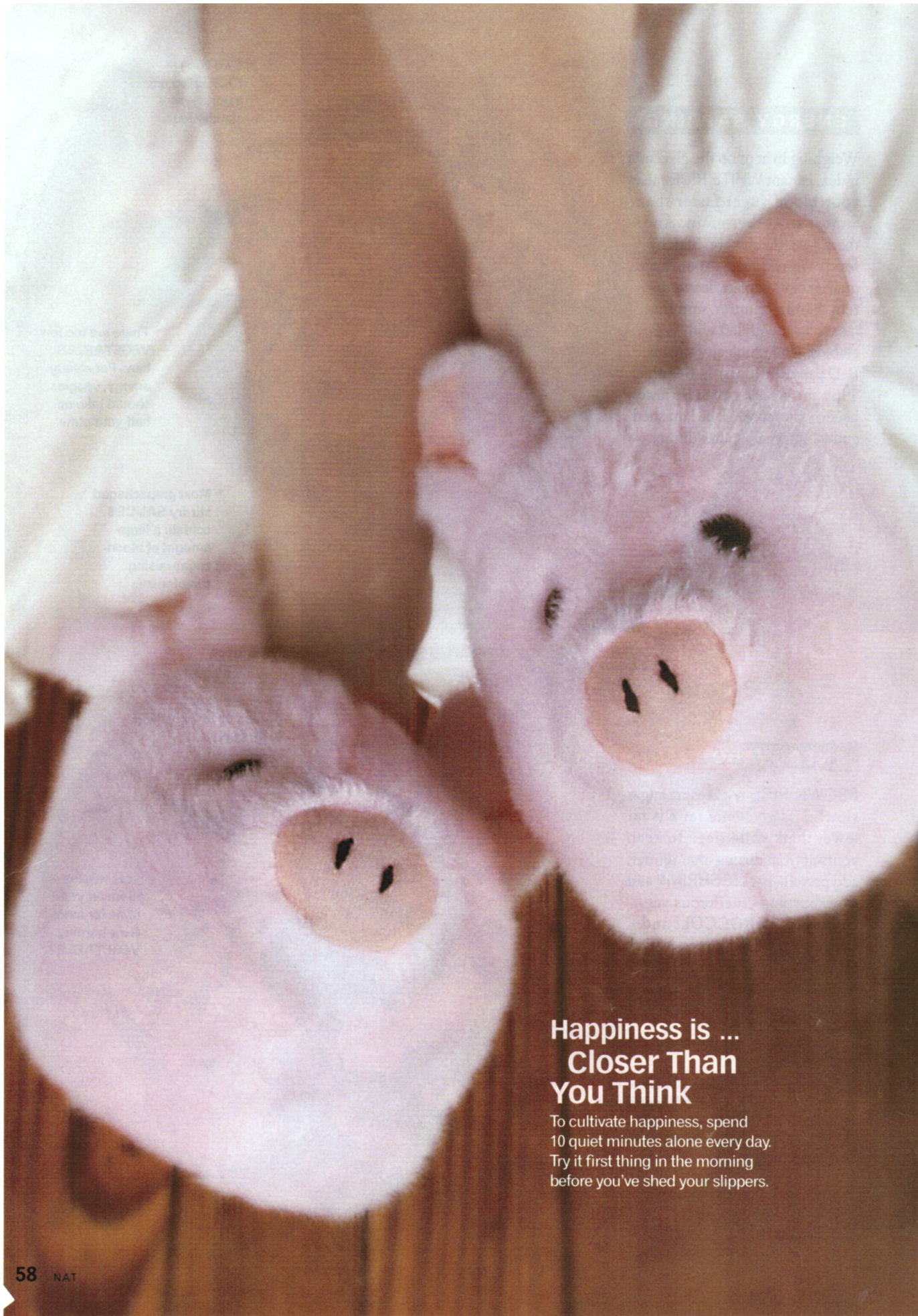


Research suggests that positive thoughts can make you a healthier person. Here's a look at some compelling results.

Happiness Helps You Live Longer. In 1975, 660 people over 50 in a small Ohio town answered questions on their attitudes about aging and other topics. When researchers checked back with them in 1998, those who viewed aging as a positive experience lived an average of 7.5 years longer than those who had a negative outlook. Another study followed nuns. It examined autobiographies the sisters wrote at age 22 and found that as they aged, the nuns who used positive language in their 20s lived 9.3 years longer than their unhappy counterparts.

Happiness Protects Your Heart. In two studies conducted in 1998 and 1999, people were shown a scary film clip or asked to make a speech, causing their blood pressure and heart rates to escalate. Next, they were shown one of several film clips. Those who saw a funny film or one that triggered contentment returned to their usual cardiovascular readings faster than those who watched a sad or neutral film.





**Happiness is ...
Closer Than
You Think**

To cultivate happiness, spend 10 quiet minutes alone every day. Try it first thing in the morning before you've shed your slippers.

your alarm 10 minutes earlier than your usual wake-up time (before your family wakes or the phone rings) and shuffle in your slippers to a quiet room. Write in your journal, pray, do mind-clearing breathing exercises, or just light a candle and sit quietly.

This practice helps you find happiness in two ways. First, it stanches the flow of harsh stress chemicals like adrenaline and cortisol, which can build up, making you anxious, irritable, and unhappy. Second, practitioners of Buddhism and yoga believe that when you learn to quiet this demanding inner voice, something amazing happens. "When you get quiet and still, the answers to those questions—like, what makes me happy?—automatically arise," explains Stephen Cope, senior scholar in residence at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, Mass. In time, you may see that you love woodworking projects, or discover a desire to get a dog, or realize that you'll feel resentful if you organize the family reunion once again this year.

Appreciate Good Lemonade

If you want to be truly happy, experts say, make a habit of looking for the good in your life. Develop a ritual of reviewing at least five things you appreciate each day. Maybe you enjoyed the nap you stole on the couch. Or you relished that glass of lemonade in the heat. Or you're grateful that you and your husband had time to eat dinner together.

Just how you conduct this gratitude ritual is up to you. Some experts



Pay attention to life's little joys, like ice-cold lemonade on a hot afternoon.



recommend that you write down your five things before bed so you drift to sleep on a positive note. Others suggest that you mentally take stock before every meal. You can focus on the same five things every day or come up with a new list every time. No matter which habit you choose, make your lists very detailed, says Rhonda Britten, author of *Fearless Loving* (Dutton, 2003) and founder of the Fearless Living Institute, an organization in Boulder, Colo., that offers life coaching. Instead of saying, "I'm grateful for lemonade," say "I'm grateful for the icy glass of sweet lemonade that soothed my parched throat this afternoon."

The details are worth it, Britten says. They train you to pay close attention so you're less likely to miss the little things that create positive feelings, like the tang of lemonade on your tongue, a luxurious stretch after a nap, the kindness of a stranger who retrieves the dollar you dropped, or the sound of your husband's laugh. "Happiness is in the nuances," Britten says. You'll tap a limitless source of joy if you notice the nuances and relish them.

Treat Yourself Like a Pal

You can't be happy if you talk to yourself in negative ways. "The things you tell yourself do have an impact on your mood and on your body," Zoglio says. Negative thoughts trigger the release of the stress chemicals that make you feel worse. And many of us have a tape of harsh criticism running endlessly in our heads. You might yell at your child and then tell yourself you're a bad parent. Or eat a piece of chocolate cake and then scold yourself for ruining your diet.

If you're sabotaging your chances for contentment and inner peace with this kind of talk, make a decision to address yourself as you would a good friend, Zoglio says. Pledge to pay close attention to your thoughts, and when you find yourself having a negative thought, replace it with a positive one.

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RETREAT WITHIN

— And make your life a sanctuary of peace. —



Autobiography of a Yogi

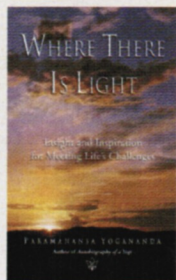
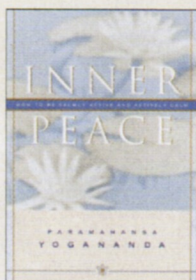
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HOW TO FIND TRUE HAPPINESS

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Zoglio recommends thinking of it in computer terms: Simply bring up a new screen and start typing a new, kinder message. You might remind yourself you're a loving mother who just had a lapse and try in the next hour to be more patient. Or you could forgive yourself for the cake and aim to eat plenty of vegetables tomorrow.

If you find this new thinking difficult—and it can be tough at first, psychologists say—you might try an audiotape of positive affirmations. One option is the appropriately named Affirmations, created by psychotherapist Belleruth Naparstek (\$13; 800-800-8661; www

To be truly happy, know your talents and use them daily. Instead of dwelling on where you fall short, focus on your strengths, says psychologist Dan Baker, Ph.D.

.healthjourneys.com). Some people find that listening to positive, nurturing statements once or twice a day for several weeks helps them break a negative self-talk habit.

Invite Someone to Dinner

Another habit that will lead you to true happiness: being generous. "The Buddha said that if we understood the power of generosity to create happiness, we would never sit down to a meal by ourselves," Cope says.

He recommends that you develop what he calls a "generosity practice." From time to time we all have natural impulses to be generous, he says. For example, it might cross your mind that a lonely friend would love an invitation to dinner, an elderly aunt might appreciate a phone call, or a co-worker could use a cup of tea. You might normally quash the thought with excuses: You don't have time, you don't want to spend the money, it might be awkward. But the next time you have one of these thoughts, "practice going with it," Cope says. The act of giving creates happiness in both the

giver and the receiver, and those good feelings can linger a long time, he says.

Give Roses If That's Your Gift

Finally, to be truly happy, experts say, you must know your talents and use them daily. Many people spend their lives trying to overcome their weaknesses (traits like disorganization, a short temper, or terrible shyness). "In my mind, this is largely an act of futility," Baker says. Instead of dwelling on where you fall short, he recommends that you spend more energy on your strengths: You're an empathic listener or a gifted cook, or you possess a green thumb.

If you're unclear about your strengths, pay attention to what you're doing "when you have a smile on your face," Britten says. Make a list of these happy moments for at least a week. Next, she says, inventory your abilities. Write down every skill you use at work or at home, and break each one into its smallest components. For example, don't write "I know how to be a receptionist." Instead, write "I make nervous visitors feel comfortable," "I have a nice phone voice," or "I know how to juggle many tasks at once."

When you're finished making both lists, spend the next day's quiet time studying them. Pick out a few of your strong suits and happy moments, and pledge to repeat them as often as you can. Maybe you enjoy connecting with people on the phone. Make an effort to call your co-workers at work instead of sending them email. Or, say you're passionate about roses. Maybe it's time to start a website for fellow flower gardeners. Organizing your life around your gifts gives you a sense of purpose. "Happy people know why they got up this morning," Baker says. ●

Erin O'Donnell is a senior editor at Natural Health.