

The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People and The 100 Simple Secrets of Great Relationships

--David Niven, Ph.D.

Happy People

Humor/Positivity/Fun

- In studies of hundreds of adults, happiness was found to be related to humor. The ability to laugh, whether at life itself or at a good joke, is a source of life satisfaction. Indeed, those who enjoy silly humor are one-third more likely to feel happy. *Solomon 1996*
- Scientists have a very hard time predicting a person's happiness based on the events he or she has experienced. Instead, a far better predictor of happiness than the number of good or bad events a person has endured are the beliefs and attitudes he or she maintains. *Chen 1996*
- Regularly having fun is one of the five central factors in leading a satisfied life. Individuals who spend time just having fun are 20% more likely to feel happy on a daily basis and 36% more likely to feel comfortable with their age and stage in life. *Lepper 1996*

Friendship

- Close relationships, more than personal satisfaction or one's view of the world as a whole, are the most meaningful factors in happiness. If you feel close to other people, you are four times more likely to feel good about yourself than if you do not feel close to anyone. *Magen, Birenbaum & Perry 1996*
- Contrary to the belief that happiness is hard to explain, or depends on having great wealth, researchers have identified the core factors in a happy life: the number of friends, closeness of friends, closeness of family, and relationships with co-workers and neighbors. Together these factors explain about 70 % of personal happiness. *Murray & Peacock 1996*
- Researchers caution that we don't win *at* relationships, we win by *having* relationships.
- Research on unemployed adults found that the length of unemployment was less important to a person's self-esteem than the amount of social support received from parents, family members and friends. *Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic 1996*
- An experiment was conducted with a group of women having low life satisfaction. Some of the women were introduced to others who shared their situation, while some of the women were left on their own to deal with their concerns. Those who interacted with others saw a 55% reduction in their concerns over time, while those who were left on their own showed no improvement. *Hunter & Liao 1995*

Purpose & Meaning

- Studies of older Americans find that one of the best predictors of happiness is whether a person considers his life to have purpose. Without a clearly defined purpose, seven of 10 individuals feel unsettled about their lives; with a purpose almost seven of 10 feel satisfied. *Lepper 1996*
- Research on the effect of religion on life satisfaction found that regardless of the religion with which people affiliated, those who had strongly held spiritual beliefs were typically satisfied with life, while those who had no spiritual beliefs typically were unsatisfied. *Gerwood, LeBlanc & Piazza 1998*

- In studies of college students, those with more demanding schedules were 15% more satisfied with life. Despite the more demanding schedules, the individuals studied did not experience any more stress than those with less to do. *Bailey & Miller 1998*
- Interviews on life satisfaction levels found that those who expressed a sense of autonomy, of making decisions for themselves, were three times more likely to feel satisfied than those who did not. *Fisher 1995*
- In an experimental research program, a relationship was found between happiness and helping behavior. By helping others, we create positive bonds with people and enhance our self-image. Those who had more opportunities to offer help felt 11% better about themselves. *Pegalis 1994*

Do These

- We assume that happy and unhappy people are born that way. But both kinds of people do things that create and reinforce their moods. Happy people let themselves be happy. Unhappy people continue doing things that upset them.
- An analysis of volumes of previous research on the subject shows a strong consensus that volunteering contributes to happiness by decreasing boredom and creating an increased sense of purpose in life. Volunteers, on average, are twice as likely to feel happy with themselves as non-volunteers. *Crist-Houran 1996*
- Research on physical activity finds that exercise increases self-confidence, which in turn strengthens self-evaluation. Regular exercise, including brisk walks, directly increases happiness 12% and can indirectly make a dramatic contribution to improving self-image. *Fontane 1996*
- The passive avoidance of problems between loved ones reduces contentment by 15%. To keep in contact and maintain happiness, difficulties must be faced rather than avoided. *Simpson 1990*
- Quality and quantity of sleep contribute to health, well-being and a positive outlook. For those who sleep less than eight hours, every hour of sleep sacrificed results in an 8% less positive feeling about their day. *Pilcher & Ott 1998*
- In research on hundreds of college students, individuals were found to be happiest when they felt they were moving closer to achieving their goals. Students who could not see progress were three times less likely to feel satisfied than students who could. *McGregor & Little 1998*
- Life satisfaction was found to improve 24% with the level of altruistic activity. *Williams, Haber, Weaver & Freeman 1998*; Greater community interactions can increase happiness by almost 30%. *Sugarman 1997*

Great Relationships

Humor

- A good joke can brighten any day, bringing joy to both the teller and the listener. In a relationship, a good sense of humor helps to make the average day more fun, and lessens the burden of the bad days [The] humor must be positive, of course. Negative, biting jokes only serve to heighten tensions.

Perspective

- The ability to maintain open, healthy communication in a relationship is associated with strong levels of such highly regarded personal qualities as self-restraint, courage, generosity, commitment to justice, and good judgment. *Fowers 2001*

- In an experiment performed with couples who were experiencing conflict, half of the couples were asked to discuss the best part of their relationship and half to discuss the worst aspect of their relationship. Couples discussing the positive side of their relationship reduced their stress level by 15%, while couples discussing the negative side saw their stress level increase 48%. *Sullivan 2001*
- Satisfaction in a relationship is eight times more reliant on recent feelings and the ability to perceive improvements than it is based on the history of the relationship. *Karney & Frye 2002*
- Wealth is unrelated to relationship length and satisfaction. *Kenrick, Sundie, Nicastle & Stone 2001*
- Studies show that people expect their love life to reach its peak in their twenties or thirties, but relationship satisfaction is higher among people in their sixties than among people in their twenties. *Koehne 2000*

Truths

- The relationships of partners who characterize each other as equal in making decisions, in sacrificing for the relationship, and in performing household chores are likely to last more than twice as long as relationships in which these factors are not equal. *Gilbert & Walker 2001*
- Researchers found that those who are more direct in seeking support from their partner are 61% more likely to feel they received the support they wanted than are those who avoid explaining their needs. *Fitness 2001*
- In studies of people happily married more than three decades, the quality of friendship between the partners was the single most frequently cited factor in the relationships' success. *Bachand & Caron 2001*

Do These

- While people may employ many different conflict resolution strategies in a relationship, when both partners use the same strategy they experience 12% less conflict and are 31% more likely to report their relationship is satisfying. *Pape 2001*
- People who maintain a compassionate spirit during disagreements with their partner, considering not just the virtue of their position but the virtue of their partner, have 34% fewer disagreements, and the disagreements last 59% less time. *Wu 2001*
- People who consider their partner conscientious, a person who consistently does what they say they are going to do, were 26% more likely to rate their relationship healthy and reported 41% less conflict in their relationship. Dependability was rated among the most desired qualities in a partner. *Watson, Hubbard & Wiese 2000*

Read the books in their entirety:

The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People, © 2000 by David Niven, Ph.D., published in 2001 by HarperCollins, New York, NY exclusively for Hallmark Card, Inc. www.hallmark.com.

The 100 Simple Secrets of Great Relationships, © 2003 by David Niven, Ph.D., published by HarperCollins, New York, NY. www.harpercollins.com.