

## Don't Worry, Be Happy

Yeah, earworm. And before you hunt me down to dismember my keyboard...I came across some interesting stuff on being happy. If you don't get the reference, then you can find it here: [\[https://youtu.be/d-diB65scQU\]](https://youtu.be/d-diB65scQU)

Before I get started, if you've been in an extended period of being way down, or unrelentingly depressed, this column may not have anything helpful for you. As always, for that, I recommend finding peer support and/or using your EAP to find a good professional to talk to.

Now, to happiness! You are allowed to roll your eyes [here].

Here's an exchange a friend had with her mother after a period of feeling depressed:

Friend: "I'd like to feel happy again, Mom."

Mom: "What? You want to do cartwheels down the street every day?"

We all know that wasn't what my friend was getting at. Despite her mother's sarcastic reply, Mom may have been onto something. In the summary of a study published by scientists at UNC Chapel Hill and UC San Francisco, there's this tidbit:

"The pursuit of happiness is complex because there appear to be effective and ineffective ways of doing it."

This particular study found that people who "prioritize positivity," i.e., who plan to incorporate activities they like into their lives on a regular basis ... and actually do them ... report feeling more satisfied with life in general and had fewer symptoms of depression. Basically, doing an activity we like gives a feeling of positive emotion. It follows that planning to do it again gives a feeling of positive anticipation related to the initial positive feelings.

Interestingly enough, how we spend money affects our happiness, too. Planning to spend money on an experience...and anticipating that experience ... results in more happiness than buying a "thing." A Cornell University psychologist thinks that's because brain chemistry around spending is similar to the short term reward of food or drugs. A spike in feel-good chemicals goes away fast in the first instance while the second instance offers a longer duration of positive feelings related to the anticipation. In fact, in the July/August issue of *Scientific American Mind*, Dr. Gilovich says, "In terms of 'money well spent,' experiences come out ahead on all measures."

Another study shows that remembering happy feelings will help us feel good but analyzing the memory itself will deplete the feel-good nature of the memory. Feeling the happy emotion is more important than deconstructing it in order to figure out how or why it made you happy.

Lastly ... and maybe oddly ... enough, University of Missouri researchers found that "people who said they do pretty much the same things every day" found life more meaningful. Having a regular routine can contribute to feeling better.

Seems to me this all comes back around to being mindful of what's going on in our lives. Are we taking care of ourselves by doing things we enjoy, going for the long term reward, basking in good memory without dissecting it?

With all that in mind, if anybody needs me? I've made an end-of-season date to be at the lake one last time where I'll be teaching my friend's girls how to do handstands in the water. And periodically trotting out that giggling fun memory to get me through the coming seasons until I get to do it again!