



Get Up, Get Out, Get Happy!!!

***Want to help make the world a better place?
Want to feel happier and more fulfilled?
It won't happen sitting at home!
So get out into the community and become involved.***

It is not uncommon for those of us who live with chronic medical conditions to find our way into the depths of despair and feel totally unmotivated. The diagnosis of a pituitary condition often leads to a situation where life is no longer as it once was and it may be necessary to re-think the direction of one's life, re-evaluate those things of importance to us and re-define what is 'normal' in our life. That's the bad news...

The good news is that, while life may throw illness, poverty or sheer bad luck our way, this should not - and also need not - make life a complete misery. The choice is yours and you may be surprised at how, with a little thought and effort, feelings of happiness and fulfillment can return to your life. Interested? Read on....

University of Illinois psychologist, Edward Diener's studies have found that those with the highest levels of happiness and lowest levels of unhappiness were characterised by their strong commitment to creating close interpersonal ties and developing social skills and social support networks. Surprisingly, Diener found that additional income, education, IQ, youth, winning lotto and sunny days made little difference to life satisfaction in the long-run. It has also been found that genetic make-up accounts for approximately 50% of one's satisfaction with life. (David Lykken 1995; University of Minnesota)

If these characteristics are on your side, then the battle will already be half won. If not, however, hope is certainly not lost.

You may simply need to go about things a little differently in order to experience that warm, fuzzy feeling we call happiness – or, at the very least, not experience overwhelming sadness!!! Numerous researchers believe that we can control our happiness levels. This line of thought is known as "positive psychology" and commonly involves three components (Seligman)

- 1) Getting more pleasure out of life (ie: savoring positive sensory experiences such as holidays);
- 2) Becoming more engaged in what you do; and
- 3) Finding ways of making your life feel more meaningful

The most fundamental way in which to achieve happiness, based on these criterion, is to actively participate in society. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly observes that, "Almost every person feels happier when they're with other people...If you're alone with nothing to do the quality of your experience really plummets."

The best news of all comes in the form of research that suggests that positive emotions can have a positive consequence on;

- a) Physical health
- b) Longevity
- c) Improved immune function

This seems to be common sense given that stress is known to be a precursor to poor health. Researchers say that people who are happier tend to cope with stressful situations and respond to

medical setbacks in a more effective manner than others. Elimination of stress does not result in happiness. However it does seem clear that the path to happiness, given the right frame of mind, can be relatively simple – and fun.

Involvement in social or physical activity is said to result in the greatest increase in positive emotion (Watson 2002). Music, art and outdoor activities follow (Argyle 2001). Other happiness boosters include acts of kindness and gratitude.

Why is this? Because when we give we feel good about ourselves. It makes us forget our own issues and instead we feel connected and important to others. This creates happiness because we feel meaningful and useful.

Essentially, the ball is in our court – your frame of mind is your choice. Of course, we all have the right to be sad at times. There are innumerable circumstances which can cause you to feel overwhelmed with negative thoughts and no-one should criticize you for falling victim to such situations. Yet things can only improve in such low times. Even studies of people who have become paralysed have found that, despite initial feelings of anger and anxiety, as time goes by happiness can become their strongest emotion. The reason for this shift is said to be the allocation of attention – namely, to things other than the limitations of being paralysed.

So, while the world isn't perfect, it is relatively simple to put on a smile, get out into the community and make a contribution. Drowning sorrows at the cash register or bottle shop has rarely proven successful. What goes around comes around. By getting out there and doing something for nothing will be, for most people, the best way to feel better about one's self. And just maybe the world won't look so bad as it once did.

Keep Smiling, Maryann

8 Tips for Travelling the Road to Happiness

To help you on your way, Sonja Lyubomirsky (researcher at the University of California) has devised the following list of practical tips for increasing happiness:

Count your blessings: perhaps a 'gratitude journal' to write down 3-5 things for which you are thankful each week. These can be mundane or magnificent. It doesn't matter.

Practice Acts of Kindness: This makes you feel generous, capable, connected to and approved of by others.

Savor life's joys: Pay close attention to momentary pleasures and wonders

Thank a mentor: Don't wait to express thanks, if possible, in person.

Learn to forgive: Write a letter to whatever or whoever has wronged you. You do not have to give it to them, but at least writing the letter of forgiveness will help you move on.

Invest time and energy in friends and family: The most important people in your life.

Take care of your body: Get plenty of sleep, exercise, stretching, smiling and laughing.

Develop strategies for coping with stress and hardships: Perhaps religious belief, or simply a belief in one's self and trust in the universe that, "*This too shall pass,*" and "*That which doesn't kill me will only make me stronger,*" or "*This has happened for a reason so I must learn from this experience.*"

Information for this article was sourced from the following articles:

Claudia Wallis, **The New Science of Happiness**; What makes the human heart sing?

Researchers are taking a close look. What they've found may surprise you, TIME Magazine: Special Mind Body Issue, January 17th, 2005.

Full article at: http://www.brightlightfoundation.net/new_scientific.php?id=7

The Advertiser: Features, **Happy People are Better Off**, 13 January 2006, News Limited.

Cynthia Carruthers, Colleen D Hood, Research Update, **The Power of Positive Psychology**, 1 October 2005, Parks & Recreation Vol 40, Issue 10, pg 30, © 2005 Bell & Howell Information & Learning Company. See: <http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=2985>