

Does being happy
make someone
healthier



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Does Being Happy Make Someone Healthier? Name: Course: Date: Does Being Happy Make Someone Healthier? Introduction Happiness has always been said to be synonymous with good health.

The physical body depends on the mental state to respond to stimuli. A person's psychological state therefore dictates the overall state of the physical body. Mental instability is said to cause harm to the physical body.

Human health is said to rely so much on the moods of the individual. Happiness is said to possess some effects on both the mental and physical functions of the body. Healthy people are said to live longer lives. Jovial and lively people are said to have longer life spans compared to people who always show sadness and grief. Another contribution to human health attributed to the moods of the individual is cardiovascular health. A happy person is said to have a healthier heart compared to one who is sad.

Happiness also has a significant impact on the mental health of an individual. Being consistently happy enables one to develop and maintain a stable and healthy psychological state. The rate of body healing after disease attacks and injuries is also credited to the mental state of the individual. Happy people heal faster when injured or sick compared to those who are not happy. In view of the above, happiness has a great role to play in the health of the individual. Being happy has a particular special effect on the health of a person. Many studies have been done to quantify this theory and many researchers agree that happiness has a significant on various aspects of human health. A consistent happy mood can make someone more physically and mentally healthy.

Happiness and Long Life A happy individual is more likely to live a longer life than a sad person is. Happiness has been credited to make individuals live longer lives. According to Elizabeth Scott's article, The Link Between happiness and Health, happiness is synonymous with longevity (Scott, paragraph 4). She quotes a study about nuns and says that according to that particular study nuns who were happier were found to live longer than nuns who were less cheerful. The study quoted says that the most cheerful nuns were able to live beyond ninety-four years. In the same article, Scott says that optimists have been found to live longer lives than pessimists do (Scott, paragraph 6). Optimism is closely related to happiness.

Optimism contains several elements of happiness. While happiness concerns being cheerful optimism generally refers to the act of looking at events in a positive way. Optimists view the positive occurrences in their lives as their own creations. This attitude enables them to have greater control on life.

According to Scott, optimism had a wide range of health benefits including the benefits of a long life. Danner et al detailed the components of the nun study in their analytical paper. The nun study was a study carried out on 180 nuns from the Catholic Church in Milwaukee, Baltimore, Maryland and Wisconsin in convents of the sisters of Notre dame. The study was taken when the nuns were around 22 years. The emotional content of the nuns was recorded.

The nuns were required to write autobiographies. These autobiographies were then classified based on emotional content. Those who were considered happiest were given a score of positive.

Those who were relatively less happy were given a negative score while those who were in the middle were given a neutral score. This emotional content was then related to the likelihood to live beyond 75 years. These results were then tallied 58 years later in 1991 against the number of surviving nuns. According to the survey done for nine years after 1991, the participants were now aged between 75 and 95 years. During this time, 76 of them had died. This amounted to 42% of the sample studied 58 years before.

The study was able to discover a positive relationship between positive emotions and long life (809). According to the study, those nuns who were happier had the highest likelihood of living beyond 75 years. The study's records done when the nuns were 22 years were found to have a major influence on their ability to survive 60 years later. Their study showed a correlation between a person's emotions and the number of years that person is likely to live. Happiness Improves Mental Health A positive mental state has always been related to a stable psychological ability. People who are consistently happy and cheerful are bound to be more intelligent and more mentally sound than those who are relatively less happy.

Many researchers have tried to prove this positive correlation with successful results. Mental health experts have also acknowledged the impact of a positive attitude on both the physical and the mental health of an individual. Mental health professionals and psychologists have discovered this correlation and are applying it in the treatment of mental health disorders. This therapy, also known as 'positive psychology' has been known to have many health benefits (Hershberger, 630). Hershberger further examines the <https://assignbuster.com/does-being-happy-make-someone-healthier/>

authenticity of this theory in the mental health profession. He acknowledges the efforts of psychologists to develop the positive psychology theory in treating mental health disorders in recent times. Hershberger confirms in his paper that ‘ the science of happiness’ as he calls it has been credited with increasing mental stability and self control (Hershberger 631).

He quotes a study that tried to find out the effects of positive emotions (happiness) on the diagnostic abilities of mental health professionals.

According to this particular study, physicians who expressed a high level of positive emotion were said to make the best diagnostic decisions compared to their counterparts. Hershberger in his analysis outlines several key factors that should be considered in positive psychology. He lists gratitude, signature strengths and satisficing behavior as the key elements of happiness in ensuring the mental health of a person (Hershberger 631-632).

According to the world happiness report by John Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey Sachs emotions play a great role in the way we interact, make decisions and form ideas (Helliwell et al 5). The report calls on the policy maker and governments to try as much as possible to develop policies based on measures that would improve the happiness levels of the people. The report cites studies made by psychologist and other players.

These studies show that happiness can be measured and compared with physical and brain functions to predict the behavior of individuals in society (Helliwell et al 6). The report highlights some major achievements in the study of the science of happiness in order to prove its insurmountable influence on the human brain. These studies evaluate people’s emotions in relation to their everyday performance. According to the report, there are

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two characterizations of happiness. The first refers to a person's daily emotions also known as affective happiness.

The second classification refers to an individual's general assessment of life also known as evaluative happiness. According to the report, the two classifications have immense influence on various aspects of man's everyday life. Affective happiness for example, is concerned with the daily adventures of life related to jobs, family and friends. Evaluative happiness on the other hand relates to a person's contentment or discontent with their social standing.

Evaluative happiness addresses the concerns of a person's view of poverty, income and so on. Helliwell et al suggest that a study of happiness has important suggestions on that could lead to the discovery of methods through which we can improve health and make people live longer (Helliwell et al 20) Happiness has also been related with low stress levels. Happier people are said to suffer less from psychological complications such as stress and depression. According to a survey conducted by Abdollah Omid, Hossein Akbari and Mehrdad Mahdian on the relationship between happiness and stress in college students, they discovered a negative relationship between these two factors (Omid et al 490). They found out that there was a distinct relationship between these two factors but that more happiness was synonymous with less stress and vice versa. They cited previous studies that have developed correlation between happiness and health.

They say that since happiness influences an individual to avoid harmful behavior such as smoking or drug use it definitely also helps in stress

reduction. They too divide the subjective assessment of an individual into a cognitive component and an affective component. The cognitive component refers to evaluative happiness while the affective component refers to affective happiness. Both characteristics are described above. Their study focused on a sample of two hundred and fifty students of which 206 were females and 44 were male. This comprised of 82% and 18% respectively. All the students were from Kashan University of Medical Sciences.

They were all between 18 and 37 years old. The subjective study evaluated the happiness of the respondents through questionnaires and related it to the stress levels of the students. The findings of the research showed that respondents with high happiness levels posted very low stress levels (Omid et al 491). Happy People Have a More Healthy Heart Bryan Young and Ingrid Hutchinson while trying to evaluate the health benefits of happiness presented several arguments in favor of the notion that positive action influences a person's health. According to their article, there is a significant relationship between the actions of the mind and the body (Young et al 152). According to them, the brain has a major influence on the hormones and immune system of the body.

The brain influences the hypothalamus. Brain regions such as the limbic system direct a person's memory and emotions. Brain functions are interconnected within the body hence making the brain an influential part of all body functions (Young et al 152). The brain also influences the autonomic functions of the body. The autonomic body functions consist of two parts with opposite functions in the body. The first arm called the sympathetic system helps in increasing the rate of the art beat while the other part also

known as the parasympathetic system help in slowing down the heart. These two functions are supposed to ensure that the heart rate is stable.

For example during critical moments, the sympathetic system increases the heartbeat by raising the pressure of blood. This action triggers the secretion of certain hormones, which in turn cause the secretion of glucose, which strengthens the body. According to their paper, they argue that the mental state of the body has a major influence on major bodily functions such as those listed above (Young et al 153). They suggest that there is an optimum state of equilibrium in the mental state of an individual. They call this equilibrium state happiness (Young et al 153). Thus, the above brain functions can be altered or enhanced by the mental state of an individual.

Happy people are said to have a reduced stress rate meaning proper brain function hence better heart performance (Young et al 153). Another study that ascertains the supremacy of the emotional state of an individual on the health of their heart was carried out by Andrew Steptoe, Jane Wardle and Michael Marmot. In this particular study, they wanted to identify the specific effects of positive action on the functioning of important body systems functions such as the neuro-endocrine, cardiovascular and inflammatory processes (Steptoe et al Paragraph 2). In the study, they acknowledged that negative states of mind such as stress and depression are known to increase the likelihood of a person contracting coronary diseases or diabetes. They also acknowledge that positive mental states have been known to prevent the harmful effects of disease. They however assert that this latter notion is not quite understood.

In the study, they analyze the effect of positive mental states in the lives of middle-aged men and form a conclusion. The study analyzed the effects of the emotional state of happiness on the inflammatory, neuro-endocrine and cardiovascular functions of the body. These observations were made during working days and leisure days. They say that psychosocial systems influence the biological functions of an individual through the central nervous system. The study assessed the levels of happiness in individuals and proceeded to rate them according to their levels of happiness.

In their study, they found out that the happiness levels were higher during leisure days than working days (Steptoe et al Paragraph 17). An assessment of the happiness levels showed a lot of uniformity in mental states during the study period. In assessing the potential effects of happiness on the functioning of the heart, they analyzed its effects on the heart rate. A high heart rate can help predict the risk of heart disease or cardiovascular failure. The study showed a positive correlation between the health of the heart and the level of happiness of an individual. This decision was based on the fibrinogen stress reactions of the participants.

Fibrinogen can be used to predict possibilities of future heart disease. Among the high happiness category, the fibrinogen stress levels were lower compared to the lowest category. This showed a significant risk of heart disease in the low happiness group. From the above studies, it is highly certain that a high happiness is synonymous with a lower risk of heart disease.

Physical and Psychological Healing According to Healing with Happiness by Bill Gee, Malik Jaffer and Memory Matanda happiness has a profound effect on the working of the mind and the healing process by extension. According to them, stress can lead to underperformance, poor health and reduce the lifespan of an individual. According to their book, happiness makes people more successful and better decision makers.

They say that even though there is very little literature on how happiness affects the health of individuals, it has been evident in the recent past that happiness makes people healthier. It improves immunity against diseases and enhances the natural system of healing. According to them, the science of happiness has become an effective tool for the healing and prevention of diseases as well as maintaining a great personal health. Due to this, happy people are more physically and mentally healthy. Mentally, happy people have a low likelihood of suffering from mental stress and have greater resilience than the unhappy (Gee et al 2).

Their blood pressure is low and they can heal faster after surgery. The book quotes a study done in Australia that substantiates this notion. In the study, ten thousand people were surveyed to determine whether happiness has any effect on the health of a person (Gee et al 3). The study revealed that happy sick people heal faster and respond more positively to treatment compared to those who are not happy.

According to the book, happiness alters the progress of disease and elongates the life span of patients in cases of deadly diseases such as HIV and AIDS. It also states that happy people are less likely to die of diseases

such as coronary heart disease (Gee et al 3). Another paper by Sonja Lyubomirsky, Laura King and Ed Diener on the benefits of positive affect also touches on the healing effects of happiness in people. In their paper, they give several examples of the many ways through which health facilitates healing in individuals. One prominent example that they quote is a study done by Collins, Hanson, Mulhern and Padberg in 1992 (Lyubomirsky et al14).

The study surveys cancer patients over the length of their treatment. According to this study, cancer patients who were happy and more cheerful exhibited a positive development compared to their counterparts (Lyubomirsky et al 14). According to another study of individuals suffering from sickle cell disease, individuals who exhibited a positive mental state were seen to respond more positively to treatment.

Their visits to the doctor and frequency of medication use were lower compared to the others. Patients who displayed happiness were also less likely to experience pain after treatment and for several days afterwards (Lyubomirsky et al 14). In a study carried out by Achat et al, the happier old people surveyed exhibited less pain in relation to those who were not happy (Lyubomirsky et al 14). The paper goes on to conclude that happiness generally improves many aspects of an individual's health including immunity, the healing process and response to medication. Conclusion Happiness is an important factor that plays a great role in the health of individuals.

It has significant effects on the mental and physical health of individuals, the functioning of the heart, longevity and the physical and mental healing of an individual. Happiness can work together. Many researchers have proven these important and fundamental roles of the mental state of an individual on his/her health (Rimer, paragraph 5). This research has assisted doctors, psychologists and mental health professionals to develop ways through which they can incorporate this technique in their therapeutic sessions. Positive psychology has therefore become an integral part of the medical psychology profession. This advancement has placed the science of happiness in an esteemed position when it comes to attending to people's health concerns.

It is therefore important for people to understand the implications of happiness on their health and embrace this new and easy formula to remain healthy. References Andrew S., Jane W., & Michael M. (2008) Positive Affect and Health-Related Neuroendocrine, Cardiovascular, and Inflammatory Processes.

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