

## *Here are seven scientific ways you can change your life to make your days more joyful!*

Happiness is an elusive goal; everyone seems to want it, but if it were easy to attain, the whole world would be happy and we wouldn't need to keep searching for it. Fortunately, some of humanity's greatest minds have concerned themselves with the pesky problem of happiness, and they've actually come up with some practical tips on how the rest of us can get there.

### *1. If you have a spiritual affiliation, practice it.*

Though religion alone isn't a great predictor of happiness, a study published in *Frontiers In Psychology* found that those who actively practiced their faith were happier than both those who had a religion but didn't practice, and those who were nonreligious. This isn't to say that you have to be religious to be happy, but if you DO have theological inclinations, you may want to make spirituality a habit.

### *2. Put down your cell phone (and don't run back to check it).*

You may anecdotally know that checking your phone 1,289 times per minute makes you a stressed-out banshee who demands more constant amusement than a 2-year-old, but a study out of Kent State University suggests that this is actually the case (though not in those words).

Researchers surveyed more than 500 students, finding that frequent cell phone use was associated with lower grades, higher anxiety and less happiness. Give Facebook a rest!

### *3. Don't rely on external validation.*

The key to happiness lies within. So says a study that examined the motivation and satisfaction levels of student-athletes at Stanford University. As the scientists expected, internal factors like mindfulness and self-esteem were better predictors of happiness than external ones like playing time and scholarships. Rather than expecting the outside world to make you happy, do some inner work.

### *4. Spend money on experiences, not things.*

Everyone knows that money can't buy happiness *per se*, but if you're going to spend money in search of satisfaction, splurge on an experience, not an expensive toy. A study in *Psychological Science* found that those who tended to spend their money on doing, as opposed to having, were better off in the long run. This effect was chalked up to the perceived superiority of anticipating an experience (like a trip) to anticipating owning an object (like shoes).

### *5. Eat your fruits and veggies!*

This one's easy! Your mother and experts have been telling you this for a long time, but now it's time to hear it from the British Psychological Society. For the first time, researchers found a correlation between fruit and vegetable consumption, and happiness — an association that researchers claimed could not be explained solely by socioeconomic factors, exercise or weight. In other words, it's not the result of eating fruits and vegetables that make you happy; the simple act of eating your greens IS happiness!

### *6. Practice gratitude.*

Gratitude is a powerful tool that may take time to hone, but a study published in the journal *Emotion* shows that over time, positive practices like expressing optimism and gratitude lead to more happiness, even compared with placebo.

### *7. Make an effort to be happy.*

It sounds like mental gymnastics, but the act of trying to be happier — perhaps by attempting some of the suggestions above — can lead to a real boost in happiness.

Researchers asked groups of people to listen to "happy" music, but one group was asked to try actively to feel better while they listened ... and they did! This effect occurred both after single listening sessions and over a two-week period, suggesting that making an effort to be happy can work both in the short term and the long run. There may not be a formula for happiness, but with these tools in hand; you're well on your way to filling each day with a bit more joy.