

# The Science of Happiness

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What does science say about happiness? Is there any research on what creates happiness? Thanks to recent studies, we now know how to define and create happiness in our lives. In a recent webinar sponsored by Wyandotte County K-State Research and Extension, certified nurse leader and health coach Michelle Lane explained the facts of happiness.

Happiness can be defined as a combination of how satisfied you are with your life plus how good you feel on a day-to-day basis. Research tells us that 10% of happiness is determined by your circumstances, 50% is biologically determined, and 40% is controlled by your thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Contrary to what many people think, happiness is not about having the best or newest things or having lots of money.



Your outlook on life and the way you view the world around you play a big role in your level of happiness. Human brains are deeply intertwined with a mind-body connection, meaning that our thoughts and feelings directly impact our overall health. Happy people are less likely to have cardiovascular disease, have higher immunity, heal faster, have a healthier diet, and live longer lives. With over 40 years of research from Johns Hopkins, we know that diseases progress quicker in people with a negative outlook. By choosing to be happy, you can add 7 ½ years to your life! Not only does it feel good to be happy, but it is also good for our health.

A large part of our mindset is linked to four major chemicals produced in our gut. When we are fetuses inside the womb, the brain and brainstem actually pinch off from the cells that make up the stomach. This is why gut health is so important and why the saying “You are what you eat” actually has some truth behind it. Dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins are the magical quartet of hormones that affect how we feel. When we accomplish something, dopamine is released into our bloodstream. Oxytocin is the love hormone and is triggered through social bonding, eye contact, and attentiveness. Giving hugs is a great way to release this hormone for a feel-good buzz. Serotonin flows when you feel important or significant. Gratitude is a great way to recognize someone or praise them, which increases serotonin. UV rays also help create serotonin so getting a little bit of sun each day (20 min) can boost your mood. Finally, endorphins are released in response to pain and stress. They help relieve anxiety and depression. Strenuous exercise, spicy foods, and cold showers release lots of endorphins.

Besides a good diet, what can we do throughout our day to increase happiness? Establishing deep, nurturing relationships with others can create a feeling of belonging, fulfillment, and overall happiness. Feeling connected with others that we truly care about helps alleviate stress. Physical markers such as blood pressure or cholesterol have less to do with how long we live than the social interactions we have as we age. Isolation and loneliness have been proven to decrease life expectancy. Be intentional about new experiences, help others, be kind, and be grateful. Doing these things will create happiness that is long-lasting.

If you are interested in watching the webinar and learning more about this topic, it can be found on YouTube at <https://bit.ly/KSREhappiness>. For more information, contact Cassidy Lutz at [celutz@ksu.edu](mailto:celutz@ksu.edu) or by calling 620-625-8620.