



Through the ages

Doing what makes you happy is the key to a rich and fulfilling life, but your idea of what that actually is can shift and change with time

These days everyone's chasing happiness, but what it means to be happy isn't static—it tends to evolve and change over the course of your life. What made you happy in the flourish of youth might no longer appeal now that you're a few years older.

In a study about happiness published in *The Journal Of Consumer Research*, it was found that, on average, younger adults tend to seek their happiness in extraordinary and

goal-achieving experiences whereas older people are more content with the joy found in ordinary, everyday moments. With the wisdom of age, it seems the simple pleasures offer the greatest contentment: a quiet meal with loved ones; a day spent outdoors gardening; a cozy night in reading a book.

Of course, growing older, providing you're in reasonable health, doesn't necessarily curtail your goal-achieving joie

de vivre. Some people become more active, adventurous, and daring in their later years, perhaps because they feel more liberated to do what they really love.

When it comes to sustaining happiness, it is also thought that shared experiences are key. A long-term research project that is part of the Harvard Study of Adult Development revealed that close relationships, more than money, materialism, or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives. Having a network of friends that you can relate to and with whom you can share experiences, activities, and life's concerns, helps to maintain joy and contentment through life's ups and downs.

There are countless opinions on happiness. In the quest for living happily ever after, it would be easy to succumb to what's expected or considered normal in terms of how to be happy. It's far better, however, to explore what happiness means to you and how that sense of joy can be

sustained through life's inevitable times of loss, sadness, and dilemma.

Despite life's challenges, and often as a result of them, some people are able to stay happy by being mindful of their choice to live joyfully.

Lesley Pyne (LesleyPyne.co.uk) is author of *Finding Joy Beyond Childlessness: Inspiring Stories To Guide You To A Fulfilling Life*. She says, "I'm childless, an only child, and have lost both parents, yet I'm happier than I've ever been. You might find that hard to believe, and I would have too; at my lowest it felt as though all the happiness had been ripped from my life. Then I decided I didn't have to be a victim so I started to consciously look for joy."

Lesley realized that happiness often comes in everyday moments. She says, "I wrote a list of small pleasures; things that bring me joy, such as a cup of coffee, pausing to look up at the sky, and doing something creative. I make time to do these things every day."

“Happiness is not something you postpone for the future; it is something you design for the present”

JIM ROHN



Practicing gratitude is also at the heart of Lesley's happiness for life. She says, “Even though I was challenged by grief, I wrote down three things I was grateful for and why. Having a gratitude practice and looking for happiness in small things have brought so much more joy into my life.”

Finding lasting contentment is also rooted in being of service and living a life of purpose.

Kitty Waters, host of the Kitty Talks podcast and teacher of the Do Your Dharma course at kittytalks.com/doyourdharma, believes that long-term happiness can be found in sharing your gifts and doing what you love. She says, “The secret of life is to give. When we give to others we feel an amazing sense of fulfillment, purpose, and meaning. It fills us up in a way that nothing else can.”

Kitty, who works with women to help them understand the concept of dharma and how they can create happy lives in alignment with their souls, says, “The more you go toward the things you love the more the path of purpose unveils itself to you. The real work is uncovering yourself as a person and what it is that you love to do.”

In finding lifelong happiness, Kitty says, “Listen to your inner voice. It's there to direct you and keep you on the right path. Find your gift and give it away.”

Novelist Thomas Wolfe once said, “We are the sum of all the moments of our lives—all that is ours is in them.” With this in mind, happiness is about discovering what gives you joy and contentment in every moment. It's

about being mindful of doing more of what makes you happy as you travel along the years.

Is it time for a happiness review?

Are you feeling empty and discontent as if all the pleasure has evaporated from your life? Are you doing things that used to fill you with joy while wondering why you don't feel the same excitement or fulfillment? If so, perhaps it's time to review what makes you happy now.

Notice how you feel as you go about your day. Are you happy with your vocation, hobbies, activities, and social circle? Most importantly, are you happy and at peace with yourself? If not, how can you make some changes to ensure a greater level of contentment?

Be mindful of your sense of happiness in this moment rather than what made you feel happy in the past. Perhaps you need to let go of an activity that is no longer fun or meaningful. Maybe it's time to enjoy a different pace of life, a new career, or a change in routine.

Try not to judge yourself or react to judgment from others if you decide that, these days, you'd sooner enjoy an evening at home rather than partying all night long. Equally, if you're in your senior years and are excited about going on adventures rather than winding down to a quiet life, don't be deterred.

Only you can know what it is that makes you feel deep joy and contentment in any given moment. Embrace your happiness in the now.



HAPPINESS TIMELINE

Young adult

From late teens to mid-30s, most young adults, inspired by their contemporaries and the latest fads, tend to seek happiness in having exciting and extraordinary experiences such as traveling to exotic locations, having thrilling adventures, or even meeting their favorite celebrities (and broadcasting it on social media). Believing in a bright future ahead and fueled by the attitude “you only live once,” they also look for happiness in their careers, achievements, wealth, and relationships. They have the energy to live life to the full and feel young enough to achieve their life's goals. If you're in this age group, avoid the temptation of doing what everyone else is doing just because it's trending. This can leave you feeling empty and dissatisfied. Consider what makes you, as an individual, truly happy, and do that instead.

Mid-life

On average, happiness can easily slump through people's 40s and 50s. Mid-life is a time of reflection and change. Women are in, or approaching, menopause, which can be physically challenging and a highly charged emotional time. For men, life's choices, hopes, and dreams come under review. Both men and women can feel disappointment and discontentment if life hasn't quite turned out as planned. If you're in this age group, accept that the past has passed and focus on what makes you happy now. Consider how you can bring more joy into each day.

60-plus

Providing those age 60-plus are in good health and have a positive state of mind, this can be the happiest and most contented period of life. People of this age start living more in the moment, enjoying life's simpler pleasures. If you're in this age group, focus on doing more of what makes you happy. Although some find happiness in a gentler way of life, others become care-free and adventurous. Seize the day! These golden years are yours to enjoy rather than endure so keep a positive mindset, a smile on your face, and joy in your heart.



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