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# Can you really THINK YOURSELF HAPPY?

Is happiness just a state of mind? Experts reveal the part our mindset plays in this elusive state

**W**hat does happiness feel like for you? For me, it appears in unexpected glimpses: the caress of a cool breeze through an open car window on a summer's day; the shared rush of uncontrollable laughter with a friend; the flitting of sunlight across the face of my child as he plays. And, always, it leaves me momentarily speechless, before disappearing as quickly as it came, like a sly cat slipping through a crack in the door. Every time it happens, I think, 'What if I could call it back; make it stay?' Which begs the question: Why can't/don't we?

According to Relational Psychotherapist Hannah Beckett-Pratt, this feeling of happiness slipping through our fingers could be down to the fact that there is no universal definition of happiness. "When we say we feel happy, we are usually describing the experiencing of emotions such as joy and exuberance, often in response to external events," she says. "However, it is impossible to feel these emotions all the time because the nature of being human is that we feel a variety of emotions." According to Hannah, happiness is less about feeling joy all the time and more about living a rich, meaningful and fulfilled life with plenty of joyful moments sprinkled into it.

Not only that, but we can get stuck in a happiness waiting game, where we keep outsourcing our happiness to the future, saying: 'I'll be happy when I've moved house, got a new job, started a family...' Lydia Kimmerling, master life coach and CEO of The Happiness Explorer ([thehappinessexplorer.com](http://thehappinessexplorer.com)) explains: "True happiness that relies on a shift in mindset

and getting to know yourself, alongside a contentment for what you already have is far easier to hold onto. [Because] this is purely reliant on you."

Furthermore, when it comes to living a happy life, fear is a major stumbling block, "[Fear] can motivate us to take actions that only drive us away from the things that could make us happier," Lydia adds. If you've ever stayed in a crappy relationship or job for longer than you would have liked, this is likely something you can relate to.

The good news is, we absolutely can train our brains to seek out happiness. "Our brains never stop changing and adapting over the course of our lifetime," says Becky Morrison, happiness coach and author of *The Happiness Recipe*. "This reality, called neuroplasticity, means that we can actually reprogramme or repattern our brains. One way to do this is to change our thinking. Thoughts create chemical reactions in our brain, which, over time, create patterns of neural networks and nervous system responses. Changing our thoughts changes the chemical reactions, which can create new nervous system patterns, new neural pathways and can impact how much and when areas of our brain are active." See our panel right for some really simple ways to start doing this every day.

This might sound cheesy, but perhaps cats and happiness are more alike than we think. If you chase after it, it will most likely run for the hills, but keep a warm lap and an open mind and maybe it will sit with you for a while. Wishing you every happiness.

"Accept what you cannot change and change what you cannot accept' is a helpful motto for identifying where you need to act in order to be happier"



## 6 WAYS TO THINK YOURSELF HAPPY

*Try the following tips from Hannah Beckett-Pratt to help attract happiness*

**Remove the pressure to 'be happy':** The pressure we feel to be happy in life often leads to overthinking and guilt during the times we are not. Instead of dwelling on whether you're happy, collect experiences and feelings that contribute to happiness. For example, arranging a walk with a friend, volunteering or checking in on an elderly neighbour.

**Prioritise fun:** We stop making time for play after childhood, but doing things simply for the purpose of our own enjoyment is vital to feeling happy. Consider what you find fun as an adult and do these activities regularly.

**Take responsibility for your needs:** If you're feeling stressed or miserable, ask yourself what you need to rebalance and give it to yourself.

**Accept what is:** You'll never achieve a state of happiness by wishing your life was different, because you're stuck in limbo between accepting the present reality and doing something to change it. 'Accept what you cannot change and change what you cannot accept' is a helpful motto for identifying where you need to act in order to be happier.

**Keep regret in check:** Dwelling on regret can make you feel like you could have been happier, but in truth, we will never know how different choices would have panned out. Many of my clients find comfort and clarity in realising that there is no such thing as a right or wrong choice, there are simply choices.

**Re-wire your negativity bias:** In the same way we naturally dwell on loss or overthink difficult situations that we have found ourselves in, it's important to consciously bring to mind times we have been happy. We often let these pass us by without the same attention we give to negative experiences, but bathing in the glow of joy and really letting it in, congratulating yourself on your successes; can help strengthen the neural pathways in your brain that reinforce happiness.