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# Be Happy Now

## Simple Ways to Quickly Lift Your Spirits

by April Thompson



**S**inger-songwriter Pharrell Williams, whose infectious hit song, “Happy,” has spread joy worldwide, seems to know the secret to happiness. More than 1,500 people from 140-plus countries have posted their own happy video spinoffs at *WeAreHappyFrom.com*, inspired by his daylong music video featuring Los Angeles residents from all walks of life dancing and lip-syncing to the tune.

Can happiness really be just a finger snap away? It depends on our unit of measurement—a moment versus a lifetime. Research by such authorities as Psychologist Martin Seligman, Ph.D., director of the University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center, suggests that several basic ingredients are keys to long-term happiness, including a sense of purpose, engaging activities, quality relationships and achievable goals. Ultimately, happiness is a subjective state, gauged only by personal perception.

Still, there are quick, simple things we can do to shift our mood into a higher gear, according to Jonathan Robinson, author of *Find Happiness Now: 50 Shortcuts for Bringing More Love, Balance, and Joy Into Your Life*. “Broadly, happiness shortcuts fall into two categories—those that help in letting go of negative emotions and those that help in tuning into or expanding positive feelings,” says Robinson. “The end result is the same.”

**Practice gratitude.** When the day’s affronts seem excessive, we can reframe them by counting our blessings mentally or in a journal. Review the day with an eye to everything that went right. “Soon, you’ll start to see everything as a gift,” observes Robinson.

**Pencil it in.** Take a few moments at the start of each week to block out a little time every day for happy activities.

**Pay it forward.** It doesn’t take much to make someone’s day, advises Robinson. Give someone a compliment or a piece of chocolate and watch their attitude instantly change, which in turn lifts you into their happy cloud.

**Sing and dance.** Williams applies this secret: Moving our bodies and vibrating our vocal chords helps shake us out of our mental cages. “It’s hard to feel bad when you sing. It’s a choice: You can stay angry for four hours or sing for 15 seconds,” Robinson notes.

Don’t underestimate the power of a simple jumpstart to happiness. Research from the University of Arizona shows that as little as a forced smile not only releases stress-fighting neuropeptides and mood-lifting serotonin in the brain, it activates a chain reaction of happiness around us.

Connect with freelance writer April Thompson at *AprilWrites.com*.

This fall, the University of California-Berkeley’s Greater Good Science Center will host the first public online course on the Science of Happiness. According to Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., professor of psychology and founding director of the center, the university’s meta-analysis of research indicates that 50 percent of our happiness level is tied to genetics, while only 10 percent stems from our environment.

“Therefore, about 40 percent of your happiness is up to you,” remarks Keltner. Students will learn practical, scientifically tested strategies for nurturing their own happiness and tracking progress. Sign up to audit the free course, which has already attracted 40,000 registrants, at *Tinyurl.com/UCLA-Happiness*.