

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Sherwood Chiropractic Center

The True Keys to Happiness

During these challenging economic times, many people are reconsidering what they need to be happy, and are concluding that material possessions aren't as important to their well-being as they had previously believed. And, scientific research upholds that, once basic needs are met, money has little influence on contentment.

On the other hand, exciting new research proves health and social connections play a crucial role in achieving happiness. Your doctor at Sherwood Chiropractic Center has outlined the new findings below.

Health Is No. 1

Scientific studies show that health is the No. 1 influential factor affecting happiness. Specifically, people in excellent health are almost twice as likely to be happier than those in merely good health. Conversely, poor health equates to a 70 percent reduced likelihood of happiness (*Mayo Clinic Women's Healthsource*, December 2008).

That's why it is essential to put your family's health first — especially during stressful times.

Your doctor at Sherwood Chiropractic Center has a unique chiropractic approach to wellness, which focuses on caring for the whole person, including educating patients about the interconnection between body, mind and spirit.



This approach also focuses on the spine, because dysfunction in the spinal cord may inhibit nervous system impulses, which affect all aspects of well-being. Specifically, chiropractic care centers on preventing a common disorder called **vertebral subluxation**, a condition where spinal bones (vertebrae) are slightly misaligned, or where function is restricted.

Your doctor at Sherwood Chiropractic Center corrects vertebral subluxations with gentle, effective maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

Happiness Is Contagious

Along with health, new research indicates that friends are crucial to happiness.

The investigation, which was conducted by James Fowler of UC San Diego and Nicholas Christakis of Harvard Medical School, reveals that happiness is "contagious" (*BMJ* 2008;337:a2338).

Christakis and Fowler used data from the landmark Framingham Heart Study to recreate a social network of 4,739 people who were tracked from 1983 to 2003. During this time, the study participants' happiness levels were followed using a standard assessment for psychological well-being called the Center for Epidemiological



Studies Depression Scale.

The results, which appear in the *British Medical Journal*, demonstrate that if your friends are happy, you are more likely to be happy. What's more, this phenomenon affects people up to three degrees removed! That means that if your friends have happy friends, you are more likely to be happy — even if you have never met your friends' friends.

"Scientists have been interested in happiness for a long time," explains Fowler. "They've studied the effect of everything from winning the lottery to losing your job to getting sick, but they never before considered the full effect of other people. We show that happiness can spread from person to person to person in a chain reaction through social networks."



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“One of the key determinants of human happiness is the happiness of others,” adds Christakis. “An innovative feature of our work was exploring the idea that emotions are a collective phenomenon and not just an individual one.”

Happiness Loves Company

According to the new report, happiness loves company. Happy people tend to cluster together. They also tend to move in the same social circles.

Social Network Key to Happiness

While happy people do have more social contacts than unhappy individuals, it's not the blanket number of friends you have that determines happiness. Rather it is the number of happy friends — and the number of happy friends those friends have.

Specifically, Fowler and Christakis discovered that, on average, every happy friend boosts an individual's odds of being happy by 9 percent. Alternatively, each unhappy friend decreases it by 7 percent (*BMJ* 2008;337:a2338).

Happiness, the researchers found, spreads in a social network up to three degrees of separation: You are 15 percent more likely to be happy if directly connected to a happy person; 10 percent if it's the friend of a friend who is happy; and 6 percent if it's the friend of a friend of a friend.

Unhappiness also spreads by multiple degrees of separation, but not nearly as much as does happiness, say the researchers (*BMJ* 2008;337:a2338).

Friends Influence Happiness Far More Than Money Does

“The effects we observe may not seem like much at first,” notes Fowler, “but consider that an extra \$5,000, in 1984, was associated with just a 2 percent boost in happiness, and you see that the power of other people is incredible. Someone you don't know and have never met — the friend of a friend of a friend — can have a greater

influence than hundreds of bills in your pocket.”

Other studies show that once basic needs are met, money or material possessions have little influence on happiness (*Mayo Clinic Women's Healthsource*, December 2008).

Personal Interaction Matters

Today many people “connect” with friends and family primarily through phone calls, e-mail and social networking Web sites. However, Fowler and Christakis emphasize that personal interaction with friends and physical proximity to them has a dramatic impact on happiness.

Specifically, they found that when a friend who lives within a mile becomes happy, it increases the probability a person is happy by 25 percent. However, more distant friends have no significant effect. Similar effects are seen in siblings who live within a mile and in co-resident spouses versus distant siblings and distant spouses, they say.

Next-door neighbors have a whopping 34 percent effect on happiness, while neighbors further away — even on the same block — do not.

“We think the spread of emotion has a fundamental psychobiological aspect,” explains Christakis. “Physical personal interaction is necessary, so the effect decays with distance.”

A Big Responsibility

The researchers hope that their work motivates individuals to take greater responsibility for their own happiness — because it affects dozens of others.

“The pursuit of happiness is not a solitary goal. We are connected, and so is our joy,” says Fowler.

How to Grow Your Circle of Happiness

So, you know that happiness is contagious, and the more happy friends you have, the greater your odds of main-

taining a contented and fulfilling life. But just how do you go about expanding your circle of happiness? Here are three simple ways to do just that: First, start by choosing a few activities that bring contentment to your life, such as cooking classes, jogging or participating in a book club. If those activities make you happy, they are a likely source of potential new happy friends. Secondly, consider volunteering for a cause close to your heart. Studies show that people who volunteer are not only happier, but also live longer. Third, make an effort to spend more time with the happy friends you already have, and ask them to invite other friends to join you for a lunch out or other activity.

We See the Big Picture

This chiropractic practice focuses on caring for the whole person. We understand that the body, mind and spirit function in conjunction, not in isolation. That's why we educate patients about achieving all aspects of optimal health. Call us today to learn more about this unique, holistic approach!



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