



# 7 Habits of Incredibly Happy People

by Gregory Ciotti

*While happiness is defined by the individual, I've always felt it foolish to declare that nothing can be learned from observing the happiness of others.*

In our day-to-day lives it is easy to miss the forest for the trees and look over some of the smaller, simpler things that can disproportionately affect our happiness levels. Luckily, we can go off more than just our intuition; there are lots of studies that aim for finding the right behavior that leads to a happier life. Below, we take a look at some of the more actionable advice.

## **1. Be Busy, But Not Rushed**

Research shows that being “rushed” puts you on the fast track to being miserable. On the other hand, many studies suggest that having nothing to do can also take its toll, bad news for those who subscribe to the *Office Space* dream of doing nothing.

The porridge is just right when you're living a productive life at a comfortable pace. Meaning: you should be expanding your comfort zone often, but not so much that you feel overwhelmed. Easier said than done, but certainly an ideal to strive towards.

Feeling like you're doing busywork is often the result of saying “Yes” to things you are not absolutely excited about. Be sure to say “No” to things that don't make you say, “Hell yeah!” We all have obligations, but a comfortable pace can only be found by a person willing to say no to most things, and who's able to say “Yes” to the *right* things.

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## **2. Have 5 Close Relationships**

Having a few close relationships keeps people happier when they're young, and has even been shown to help us live longer, with a higher quality of life. True friends really are worth their weight in gold. But why five relationships? This seemed to be an acceptable average from a variety of studies. Take this excerpt from the book *Finding Flow*:

*National surveys find that when someone claims to have 5 or more friends with whom they can discuss important problems, they are 60 percent more likely to say that they are 'very happy'.*

The number isn't the important aspect here, it is the *effort* you put into your relationships that matters. Studies show that even the best relationships dissolve over time; a closeness with someone is something you need to continually earn, never treat it as a given. Every time you connect with those close to you, you further strengthen those bonds and give yourself a little boost of happiness at the same time. The data show that checking in around every two weeks is the sweet spot for very close friends.

### **3. Don't Tie Your Happiness to External Events**

*Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. —C.S. Lewis*

Self-esteem is a tricky beast. It's certainly good for confidence, but a variety of research suggests that self-esteem that is bound to external success can be quite fickle. For example, certain students who tied their self-esteem to their grades experienced small boosts when they received a grad school acceptance letter, but harsh drops in self-esteem when they were rejected.

Tying your happiness to external events can also lead to behavior which avoids failure as a defensive measure. Think of all the times you tell yourself, "It doesn't matter that I failed, because I wasn't even trying." The key may be, as C.S. Lewis suggests, to instead thinking of yourself less, thus avoiding the trap of tying your self-worth to external signals.

### **4. Exercise**

Yup, no verbose headline here, because there is no getting around it: no matter how much you hate exercise, it *will* make you feel better if you stick with it. Body image improves when you exercise (even if results don't right away). And eventually, you should start seeing that "exercise high" once you're able to pass the initial hump: The release of endorphins has an addictive effect, and more exercise is needed to achieve the same level of euphoria over time.

So make it one of your regular habits. It does not matter which activity you choose, there's bound to be at least one physical activity you can stomach.

### **5. Embrace Discomfort for Mastery**

Happy people generally have something known as a "signature strength" — At least one thing they've become proficient at, even if the learning process made them uncomfortable.

Research has suggested that mastering a skill may be just as stressful as you might think. Researchers found that although the process of becoming proficient at something took its toll on people in the form of stress, participants reported that these same activities made them feel happy and satisfied when they looked back on their day as a whole.

As the cartoon *Adventure Time* famously said, "*Suckin' at something is the first step to being sorta good at something,*" and it's true, struggle is the evidence of progress. The rewards of becoming great at something far outweigh the short-term discomfort that is caused earning your stripes.

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### **6. Spend More Money on Experiences**

Truly happy people are very proficient with what they spend on physical things, opting instead to spend much of their money on experiences. "Experiential purchases" tend to make us happier, at least according to the research. In fact, a variety of research shows that most people are far happier when buying experiences vs. buying material goods.

Here are some reasons why this might be, according to the literature:

1. **Experiences improve over time.** Aging like a fine wine, great experiences trump physical items, which often wear off quickly ("Ugh, my phone is so old!"). Experiences can be relieved for years

2. **People revisit experiences more often.** Research shows that experiences are recalled more often than material purchases. You are more likely to remember your first hiking trip over your first pair of hiking boots (although you *do* need to make that purchase, or you'll have some sore feet!)
3. **Experiences are more unique.** Most people try to deny, but we humans are constantly comparing ourselves to one another. Comparisons can often make us unhappy, but experiences are often immune to this as they are unique to us. Nobody in the world will have the *exact* experience you had with your wife on that trip to Italy.
4. **We adapt slowly to experiences.** Consumer research shows that experiences take longer to "get used to." Have you ever felt really energized, refreshed, or just different after coming back from a great show/dinner/vacation? It is harder to replicate that feeling with material purchases.
5. **Experiences are social.** Human beings are social animals. Did you know that true solitary confinement is often classified as "cruel and usual" punishment due to the detrimental effects it can have on the mind? Experiences get us out of our comfort zone, out of our house, and perhaps involved in those close relationships we need to be happy.

## ***7. Don't Ignore Your Itches***

This one is more anecdotal than scientific, but perhaps most important.

When the Guardian asked a hospice nurse for the Top 5 Regrets of the Dying, one of the most common answers was that people regretted not being true to their dreams:

*This was the most common regret of all. When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honored even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made. Health brings a freedom very few realize, until they no longer have it.*

As they say, there are seven days in the week and "someday" isn't one of them.

***How about you?***