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Happiness Strengthens Health

A medical study, by Carnegie Mellon University Psychology Professor Sheldon Cohen (published in *Psychosomatic Medicine*), has confirmed his previous landmark 2004 study showing that people who experience happiness, calmness and other positive emotions are less susceptible to illness when exposed to a cold virus, as opposed to people who lacked positive emotions.

The medical researchers studied 193 healthy adults aged 21-55, with an average age of 37. Subjects were given medical exams and completed questionnaires on their emotional style. The staff examined the study subjects over several weeks to gauge their moods and emotional styles. Later, the participants were infected with either a rhinovirus or an influenza virus. Then the subjects were quarantined and examined to determine if they came down with a cold.

The results of the study found that the happy group's higher resistance to infectious illness was due to other factors connected with positive emotions such as optimism, extraversion, feelings of purpose in life and self-esteem. And when happy people do come down with a cold, they report fewer symptoms usually found in standard experience of their illness. What's more, this protective quality were found effective regardless of the degree of their positive emotions, and of their age, race, gender, education, body mass or pre-study immunity to the virus. Scientifically, it's not known how or why the happy emotions guarded against colds and flu.

In their conclusion, Dr Cohen's team noted, "These results indicate that positive emotions play a larger and more important role in disease risk and health complaints than previously believed."

Cognitive-Behavioral Methods for Creating Happiness

Dr. Charles P. Samenow of Vanderbilt University Medical Center's department of psychiatry says, "A lot of people want to make a change (in mood) but don't believe they can do it." For most people, it just requires some knowledge and practice. Aside from a serious disorder, emotions of unhappiness and pessimism are frequently influenced by how we think and by changing our psychology, the more positive thoughts and actions we experience can have a beneficial effect on our brain's neurotransmitters, as do prescription drugs. Here are some things to consider:

Examine Why You Feel Unhappy

Then create some goals to help you feel happier. Take a look at your stress and activity levels. Are you over-extending yourself? Do you lack the time to enjoy some personal time?

Think About What Could Bring You Some Happiness

Is it a leisure activity, a hobby, a different career, etc? Do you have a talent or ability that you're not making use of? What could you do that will make you feel good about yourself?

Are You Will to Work at Being Happy?

As we get older, things may not go as we wish and optimism may decline with age. Are you will to work at being happy? As we age, it's vitally important to keep our brains active, for your health and for your outlook. What about taking a class, or reading about something you enjoy? Be open to try new things.

Accept That Mistakes Are Part of Life

And they can serve an important purpose in developing your wisdom. Don't make negative judgments about yourself and let them diminish your importance as a human being.

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Eliminate Negativity

Let go of bad experiences that upset you. Maybe your parents were critical of you; maybe you experienced some abuse or trauma. It's important that you like in the now and create a world where you feel safe, proud of who you are, and supported by people who like you.

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Sources: Positive Emotional Style Predicts Resistance to Illness After Experimental Exposure to Rhinovirus or Influenza a Virus *Psychosomatic Medicine* 2006 Nov-Dec;68(6):809-11 **Hypertension in Older Adults and the Role of Positive Emotions** *Psychosomatic Medicine* 68:727-733 (2006) **Psychological Stress and Disease** *Journal of the American Medical Association* 2007 Oct 10;298(14):1685-7 **Positive Affect and Health-related Neuroendocrine, Cardiovascular, and Inflammatory Processes** *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* May 3, 2005 vol. 102 no. 18 6508-6512