



Happiness: What Does it Take to Make You Happy? by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

One day I saw a little girl dancing around the gym locker room, singing, *"Do You Know the Muffin Man?"*, skipping and singing loud and off-key as only three year olds can. Again and again she delighted in the age-old inquiry, giggling each time as though she'd never heard it before. I had a lot on my mind that day and yes, after fourteen refrains it was mildly annoying. But the sheer joy in this child was irresistibly contagious, and my annoyance gave way to amusement. Kneeling down, (partly, I confess, in self-defense to distract her,) I inquired in exaggerated wonder, *"Do you? Do you know The Muffin Man? 'Is he a great big-ol' muffin-head with jangly arms and legs?"* In wide-eyed astonishment, frozen in her skippy little tracks, she nodded vigorously as it dawned on her that she had begun a game, and someone was joining in. Her giggles came bubbling out all over the locker-room, as each adult who'd been rushing to get on to the day's important business, was suddenly smiling at her delicious belly-laughter, remembering how magical it is to be three. It is a comfort to me that somewhere amid joy sticks and Pokemon, someone is still teaching, *"Do You Know the Muffin Man?"*

It's taken much longer to describe this small, simple delight than it lasted, but for those few moments, I was Happy. Nothing ached or required concentration. My mood instantly brightened just by stepping into a small spontaneous moment. If you are looking for The Secret to Happiness, here's a hint: Start small. Watch puppies, kittens and small children. Watch, and learn.

"Hooked on a Feeling"

Some people really are happy. They may work two jobs to make ends meet, live in cramped quarters and buy groceries with government assistance. They may be physically or mentally challenged, or never have been outside their hometown, let alone to Paris, or The Grand Canyon. Yet every day they wake up and wonder what they can do to make this a great day. Then lo-and-behold, it is! They understand how simple happiness can be. It is not a permanent state, but a moment. Some people will never be happy, no matter how fortune smiles upon them and what blessings and opportunities for education and health, comfort and love they've been given. They will never feel the peace and satisfaction that is Contentment. These people are hooked on stress. It is what fuels them, what makes them feel alive. If nothing is wrong, they're bored. These are the people who can visit the Grand Canyon or sail along the Seine --but not without thinking of jumping in!

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Naturally Happy

While we might find another's circumstances unfortunate, they may have been blessed with the "gratitude gene." Perhaps you've known people who are just easier to please and satisfied with a simpler life. Not blissed-out and ecstatic, which are delightful, albeit fleeting emotions. These people are simply, fundamentally Happy. Obviously, it is possible to be healthy and financially secure, bright and well-educated, loved and loving, accomplished, fun, generous and kind... *and* happy. They're not mutually exclusive. But happiness is personally defined. It is a matter of what we value most.

"If You're Happy and You Know It..."

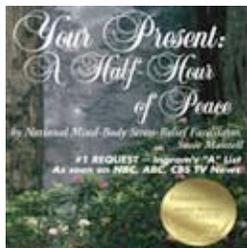
I often think about how little it takes to be Happy... or Miserable. The pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain are widely-accepted as primary motivators among animals, present company included. Some of us would be a whole lot happier if we just stopped to realize we could be.

Want to Be Happier? Try This:

I used to work with five and six year-olds. When they'd say they were, "having a bad day," I'd remind them that indeed, I could see they were having a *really* bad few minutes, but that today will be a long, full day, and there would be fun in it too. A lifetime is made of moments. How we experience a moment determines its "stress value" for us.

- Make a list of 15 friends, co-workers, relatives and neighbors whom you think are happy, and why. (*Not every single minute of their lives, but overall--basically happy people.*)
- Now ask each of them what "Happiness," is for them.
- We can learn a lot by understanding what it takes for others to feel, "happy." (BTW: The same is true about what stresses us out.)

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END OF THIS TIP##