



# The Habits of Happiness

**'Happiness is not something ready made.  
It comes from your own actions.'**

~Dalai Lama

Leo Babauta

I'm not one who believes you can be happy all the time, but I have learned you can be happy much of the time.

And that's not something that depends on how your day is going or how others treat you — it depends on what you do on a regular basis.

I remember being unhappy most days, at one point in my life. It wasn't because I hated the people in my life — I had a lovely wife, great kids, other wonderful family members and friends. It was because I was unhappy with myself, and that caused growing debt problems, unhappiness with my job, health problems and more. I felt like I couldn't change any of that.

Then one day I sat down and made a list.

I make a lot of lists — it's one of my favorite habits — but this list seemed to have a magical power. It was a list of the things I was grateful for. Amazingly, there were a lot of things on the list, from things about my wife, kids, relatives, and friends, to things about my job, about nature around me, about my life.

This list was magical because I went from feeling a bit depressed about everything, and hopeless and helpless, to much happier. My mindset shifted from the things I didn't like or didn't have, to the things I was really happy I had. And I was in control.

Since then I've experimented with a number of habits and have found a couple things to be true:

1. A handful of activities can actually make you happy.
2. If you incorporate them into your life on a regular basis (make them into habits), you'll be happier regularly.

And those might seem to be small realizations, but actually they're huge.

### **The Habits That Make You Happy**

So what habits make you happy? Try doing these on a daily basis, and see if you get the same results:

1. **List 3 Good Things.** Eva (my wife) I started a daily evening ritual, at about 7pm each day, where we take a moment to tell each other three good things about our day. We didn't invent this, but it serves as at least one time in your day when you focus on what you're grateful for. This can create a mental habit of gratitude that you can use other times in your day, when you're focused on the things you don't like or have — when you feel this, think about something you do have, that you love. Find a way to be grateful, and you're happier.



2. **Help Someone.** When we focus on ourselves, and the woeful state of our lives, we are self-centered. This shrinks the world to one little place with one little unhappy person. But what if we can expand that worldview, and expand our heart to include at least one other person? Maybe even a few others? Then we see that others are suffering too, even if that just means they're stressed out. Then we can reach out, and do something to reduce their stress, put a smile on their face, make their lives easier. Help at least one person each day, and you'll find your entire perspective shifted.
3. **Meditate.** I've called this the Fundamental Habit, because it affects everything else. Meditate for just 2 minutes a day, and you'll create a habit that will allow you to notice your thoughts throughout the rest of the day, that will help you to be more present (unhappiness comes from not being present), that will help you notice the source of anxiety and distraction. That's a lot that can be accomplished in 2 minutes! Sit every morning when you wake, and just notice your body, and then your breath. Notice when your mind wanders, and gently return to your breath. You become the watcher of your mind, and you'll learn some useful things, I promise.
4. **Exercise.** Everyone knows you should exercise, so I'm not going to belabor this point. But it really does make you happier, both in the moment of exercise (I'm exerting myself, I'm alive!) and throughout the rest of the day. Exercise lightly, if you're not in the habit yet, and just for a few minutes a day to start out. Who doesn't have a few minutes a day? If you don't, you need to loosen up your schedule a bit.

There are a number of other habits that also help: mindful eating, drinking tea, doing yoga, socializing with others. But these incorporate meditation (they're more active forms of meditation), and exercise and helping others and gratitude (if you're doing

it right). So I wanted to list the most basic habits, and then you can expand to other areas.

How do you form these habits? One at a time, starting as small as possible, with some social accountability.

Set these habits in motion. You'll notice yourself becoming more present, more grateful, more other-focused. The shift that results is nothing short of a miracle. €