

Meditation can aid in focus and emotional stability; studies suggest mindfulness may also fend off stress-related medical conditions.

YOGA AND MEDITATION PRACTICES ARE ON THE RISE



Nearly half of regular worshippers say they're very happy, compared with 26% of those who seldom or never attend religious services.

ABOUT 40% OF PEOPLE WORSHIP AT LEAST WEEKLY

Acts of kindness flick the happy switches in our brains; studies have shown that people who volunteer are more satisfied with their lives and are less likely to be depressed. Happier people, in turn, are likelier to help others. Just over a quarter of Americans volunteered in 2012, a slight decline from 2011.

KIDS

THE U.S. BIRTH RATE HAS FALLEN TO UNDER 4 MILLION PER YEAR

Studies have repeatedly found that little bundles of joy have little overall effect on parents' happiness, though single parents and those with three or more children are typically less happy than their peers.

Parents raising kids from the ages of 3 to 12 are happier than those rearing infants and teens.

62% OF NEW MOTHERS ARE PART OF THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE

Lifetime happiness trends are shaped a bit like a smile; people are happiest in their youth and golden years. Joy dips in middle age.

MORE THAN 60 MILLION AMERICANS VOLUNTEER EACH YEAR



LIFESTYLE

Heavy TV viewing can make for a less active social life. Reality-TV junkies are more neurotic and report lower levels of self-esteem.

Going back to work helps moms stay upbeat. Stay-at-home moms are more likely to experience anger and sadness than working moms.

AGING

MORE AMERICANS ARE WORKING PAST AGE 65

About 20% of Americans ages 65 and older will still be on the job by 2014. The effect of retirement on happiness depends partly on the job; highly educated workers are more likely to report a boost in well-being after getting their gold watch.

The link between pets and well-being is still being explored; studies suggest that Fluffy and Rover can ease loneliness and provide comfort, especially for the bereaved and elderly.

MORE THAN HALF OF HOUSEHOLDS IN THE U.S. ARE HOME TO A PET

Degrees don't necessarily make people happier, but money does, and higher education is linked to higher income. Teenagers say achievements like getting good grades are central to their happiness.

STAYING IN SCHOOL: THE DROPOUT RATE RECENTLY DIPPED TO 3.4% IN THE U.S.

HIGH SCHOOL

About 30% of young people say they are more stressed when they're unplugged. Still, real face time is important. Adolescents feel better when they have hobbies, play team sports and go out with friends.

ADOLESCENTS AGES 8 TO 18 SPEND MORE THAN 50 HOURS PER WEEK CONSUMING MEDIA ON PHONES AND OTHER DEVICES

SOURCES: AMERICAN JOURNAL OF CLINICAL NUTRITION; AVMA; BLS; CAREERBUILDER; CDC; ECONOMIC MODELING SPECIALISTS INT'L; ECONOMICA; FDA; GALLUP; HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW; HUFFINGTON POST; IBISWORLD; JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH; JOURNAL OF FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY; JOURNAL OF HAPPINESS STUDIES; JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY; KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION; MARKETDATA ENTERPRISES; MTV RESEARCH & STRATEGIC INSIGHTS; NASPL; NCCAM; NEES; NIELSEN; NPD GROUP; NSF; PEDIATRICS; PEW RESEARCH CENTER; PNAS; SINGLES IN AMERICA; SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY; SPORTS & FITNESS INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION; TODAY.COM; U.S. CENSUS BUREAU; WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT; YOGA JOURNAL

The GAME of HAPPINESS

RESEARCH REVEALS WHAT HELPS—AND HURTS—IN OUR PURSUIT OF BLISS

BY KATY STEINMETZ



CHOOSE HAPPINESS
Researchers investigating time perspectives have found that people who have a sentimentally good view of past events are happier and more satisfied with their lives.

CHILDHOOD

BABIES START SMILING WHEN THEY'RE AROUND 6 WEEKS OLD

By 3 months or so, babies begin initiating grins, eliciting responses and attention from their caregivers. When a mother sees her baby smile, the reward center in her brain is activated—and the baby's brain probably reacts similarly.





WORK

ONE-THIRD OF AMERICANS SAY THEY WANT TO EARN SIGNIFICANTLY MORE MONEY

Studies generally agree that higher income leads to greater well-being, though experts point out that a better predictor is often whether a person is in debt.

MORE THAN 10 MILLION ARE SELF-EMPLOYED, UP 14% FROM 2001

Being your own boss means more autonomy but can yield less job security. Overall, self-employed workers in countries like the U.S. report greater job satisfaction.

ALMOST 10% OF WORKERS COMMUTE AN HOUR OR LONGER

Commuting ranks among people's least enjoyed activities, below even chores like housework. Some happiness experts say money is better spent on eliminating a commute than on a big house in the suburbs.

Adults and children who eat unhealthy diets are more likely to be depressed. While the U.S. obesity rate has climbed in the past 20 years, the number of dieters has declined from 30% to about 20%.

Single women are more likely than their male counterparts to say that improving their appearance would make them happier; single men are more likely to say their lot would improve with better sex.

MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF AMERICANS ARE OBESE OR OVERWEIGHT

Intense aerobic activity yields a neurobiological high that encourages habitual exercise, like a daily jog. People who say they're in good health consistently say they're happier too.

DURING FISCAL YEAR 2012, AMERICANS SPENT \$78 BILLION ON LOTTERY TICKETS

Gambling is a type of risk taking, which can be exciting. But a landmark 1978 study found lottery winners were no happier and took less pleasure in everyday events.

NEARLY 30 MILLION AMERICANS RUN REGULARLY

An estimated 20 million people practice yoga, and about 60% of them say they bend and breathe to relieve stress. Yoga may help reduce blood pressure.

People are happier when they spend money on life experiences—like vacations—than on the latest and greatest products.

The big post-wedding happiness boost fades after about two years, but even then, married couples remain more blissful than singles. Nearly twice as many say they're "very happy."

When there are many choices, shopping can actually cause fatigue and regret. More important, people adapt to material goods: the new-stuff buzz doesn't last and can lead to debt.

NEARLY 14,000 PERSONAL COACHES WORK IN THE U.S., DOLING OUT LIFE ADVICE TO CLIENTS

Some executive coaches, who help groom up-and-comers in the business world, charge upwards of \$3,000 per hour.

MORE THAN 2 MILLION PEOPLE SAY "I DO" IN THE U.S. EACH YEAR

1 IN 3 STRESSED AMERICANS COPE BY SHOPPING

Studies have found that self-help books can buffer readers from depression. "Bibliotherapy" passes along many of the same lessons as in-person therapy.

The industry is not regulated, and there's little research on life coaching, though a 2003 study found that participating in a program led to better goal attainment and less stress.

HALF OF COUPLES COHABIT BEFORE GETTING MARRIED

Couples who live together before getting engaged or tying the knot are more likely to have poor confidence in their union, more negative interactions (like withdrawal) and a greater risk of eventually filing for divorce.

A 2013 study found that more than one-third of U.S. marriages now start online and that those unions are slightly less likely to end in divorce.

23 MILLION AMERICANS USE 4,000 ONLINE DATING SERVICES EACH MONTH

1 IN 10 AMERICANS TAKES ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Since the late 1980s, the variety of antidepressants has grown, as has their usage. However, some patients are more responsive to mood-altering drugs than others; some meds may also have harmful side effects.

ONLY 35% OF AMERICANS GET THE ADVISED SEVEN HOURS OF SLEEP

People who say they sleep poorly are more likely to have symptoms of depression—and less likely to say they're happy. Not getting enough sleep may leave more time for work and play, but it puts health and productivity at risk.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT PRODUCTS ARE NOW A \$10 BILLION INDUSTRY

COPING

ROMANCE