

TO YOUR HEALTH

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HAPPINESS VS. CONTENTMENT

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“All I want is to be happy!” We all know people who yearn in this way, and perhaps we have said this to ourselves at times in our own lives. But

what does being “happy” look like, feel like? Is it an attainable goal, or just a misguided notion?

According to Sidney Bloch, Emeritus Professor in Psychiatry at the University of Melbourne, “The desire to be happy is an inherent human sentiment...I would suggest that all of us crave happiness and are repeatedly frustrated by its elusiveness. While we may savor happiness episodically, it will invariably be disrupted by unwelcome negative feelings. Still, most of humankind will continue to harbor the expectation of living happily, and remains oblivious that this is a wishful fantasy”.

Indeed, it is this “expectation” that we will all live happy lives that contributes to the elusiveness of happiness, the feeling that it is ‘just out of our reach’. Barry Davenport, author and founder of LiveBoldandBloom.com, states that happiness “has a way of slipping in and out of our lives inexplicably. Some days we are brimming with it. Other days it feels as if we’ll never see it again.”

Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of the book “The Myths of Happiness” writes, “Nearly all of us buy into the myths of happiness—beliefs that certain achievements will make us forever happy, and certain adversities will make us forever unhappy. This reductive understanding of happiness is culturally enforced and continues to endure”.

Many of us struggle with the idea of happiness; the word “happy” can somehow feel too light, too airy, with too much abandon to be sustainable. Moments of happiness? Sure. But we’ve all heard well meaning folks exclaim, “We wish you a lifetime of happiness!” Really? Is that even possible?

Contentment, on the other hand, is a word worth exploring.

Contentment can co-exist with life’s celebrations, disappointments and

challenges in ways that happiness cannot. In her article “Exploring Contentment As a Way to Happiness” Debra Moffitt recalls asking herself years back, “Am I happy?” I didn’t feel anything close to ecstasy. Nor did I feel despair. I felt lonely, but I had all I needed at the moment. A friend gave me a card that held these wonderful words of wisdom by Sathya Sai Baba, ‘Contentment is the highest form of happiness’. That card sat on my table and I realized ‘I am content. I can do and be content’. Over the years, as the loneliness and trials endured, I reminded myself, ‘There are good things here, and I am content’.

Contentment is derived from the Latin word *contentus* which translates as “satisfied”.

Dictionary.com defines contentment as “satisfaction, ease of mind”. Contentment allows us to be connected to ALL of life. As Davenport so beautifully writes, “Contentment as a way of life means you actively choose to focus on the beauty, joy, love, creativity, and (also) the pain or sorrow of the moment without resistance. You embrace the breadth of the human experience in all of its expressions”.



So, where does one start when navigating past the thoughts of “I’ll be happy when....” to a position of “mindful contentment”? One can practice some of the recommendations of Davenport:

1) See the good

We spend far more time immersed in negative thoughts about our lives than we do seeing the beauty and good all around us. We focus on our problems, our lack, our suffering rather than allowing ourselves to focus on gratitude and joy for the amazing blessings in our lives. When you find yourself longing, stop and remind yourself what you are grateful for and dwell on positive thoughts about this. Allow yourself to soak in the contentment and peace of gratitude.

2) Be in Nature

When you are outside, take a few minutes to close your eyes. Breathe deeply and listen to the sounds of nature. The birds, the wind, the rustle of leaves, water lapping. Time in nature reminds us that contentment is just on the other side of our front door.



3) Give up comparisons

Comparing yourself to others inevitably leads to discontentment. Most of the time our perceptions are skewed anyway. Focus on the person you are and the person YOU want to become—not some image or standard defined by others. Be true to yourself, and don’t worry about how other people live their lives.

4) Accept Yourself

You are who you are right now. Accept that person. Don’t judge yourself, be self-critical and shaming. Remind yourself of the great and small things you’ve done in your life. Acknowledge the love, kindness, and generosity you’ve shown, commend your own hard work, creativity, and determination.

5) Keep Growing

Contentment doesn’t mean you stagnate. You can define goals for yourself and work toward them while remaining content in the here and now.

Davenport states, “Contentment affords a more reliable sense of ease and peace of mind. It allows us to savor life fully, moment to moment, without experiencing the mental and emotional suffering of longing for something else.”

So, while we will continue to enjoy happy moments in our lives, and the wonderful energy those moments bring, the hope is that we too will experience the quiet calm of contentment. Contentment can provide peace, comfort and satisfaction to one’s days.

Quotes on Contentment

“Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have.”

~Anonymous

“A harvest of peace is produced from a seed of contentment.”

~Proverb



Reminder from the Clinic



Whenever there is a change in your Primary Care Provider (PCP) it is important to notify your insurance company, the Clinic and any specialists that you see. This communication is very helpful in providing optimal health care and facilitating coordination of care.