



We asked four psychologists for their advice on how to be happy and, equally importantly, how to avoid being unhappy.

- A** There has been a lot of research which shows the importance of physical health in avoiding anxiety and depression. The mind and the body are highly interconnected. We can all make fairly easy changes in our lifestyle to include more exercise, healthier eating, getting enough sleep, being exposed to sunlight and so on. Research into exercise has found that it has a positive impact on mood. Physical activity stimulates the release of endorphins in the brain to produce the feel-good factor. Sleep is vitally important for children and adolescents to help concentration levels. A good night's sleep also stops people being bad-tempered and flying off the handle.
- B** Having good relationships is a big part of being happy. In one study, most happy people were found to have strong ties to friends and family and they made sure they spent time with them regularly. You also need at least one person who you discuss personal feelings with – called 'self-disclosure'. Just one person for a heart-to-heart is enough, together with a network of other relationships. It's not enough to have lots of friends just to do things with or chat to about music or football. That deeper connection is all-important. Some people need to learn how to listen effectively to others in order to develop stronger relationships.
- C** I would recommend being completely immersed in a pleasurable activity, sometimes called experiencing 'flow'. The activity could be anything from doing judo to painting a picture to playing chess. Typically, the activities require a certain amount of skill and are challenging but not too challenging. If you are experiencing flow, you lose track of time and are immersed in the present moment. You find the activity rewarding for its own sake. People who spend time doing 'high-flow' activities feel more long-term happiness than those doing things like just lounging around or chatting online.
- D** Make like Superman! Discover what your unique strengths and virtues are and then use them for a purpose which benefits other people or your community. People who play to their strengths (e.g. curiosity or persistence) or virtues (e.g. justice or humanity) and use them in different ways and in different situations are happier than those who focus more on their weaknesses. In other words, focus on the positive, not the negative, and be true to yourself. Studies in different countries have shown that people who do this report higher levels of well-being.