

Genes hold the key to how happy we are, scientists say

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Happiness in life is as much down to having the right genetic mix as it is to personal circumstances according to a recent study.

Psychologists at the University of Edinburgh working with researchers at Queensland Institute for Medical Research in Australia found that happiness is partly determined by personality traits and that both personality and happiness are largely hereditary.

Using a framework which psychologists use to rate personalities, called the Five-Factor Model, the researchers found that people who do not excessively worry, and who are sociable and conscientious tend to be happier. They suggested that this personality mix can act as a buffer when bad things happen, according to the study published in the March issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

The researchers used personality and happiness data on more than 900 twin pairs. They identified evidence for common genes which result in certain personality traits and predispose people to happiness.

The findings suggest that those lucky enough to have the right inherited personality mix have an 'affective reserve' of happiness which can be called upon in stressful times or in times of recovery.

The researchers say that although happiness has its roots in our genes, around 50 per cent of the differences between people in their life

happiness is still down to external factors such as relationships, health and careers.

Dr Alexander Weiss, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, who led the research said: "Together with life and liberty, the pursuit of happiness is a core human desire. Although happiness is subject to a wide range of external influences we have found that there is a heritable component of happiness which can be entirely explained by genetic architecture of personality."

Source: Association for Psychological Science

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