

Positive emotions increase life satisfaction by building resilience

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(PhysOrg.com) -- People who seed their life with frequent moments of positive emotions increase their resilience against challenges, according to a new study by a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill psychologist and colleagues.

The study, “Happiness Unpacked: [Positive Emotions](#) Increase [Life Satisfaction](#) by Building [Resilience](#),” appears in the June issue of the bimonthly journal *Emotion*.

“This study shows that if happiness is something you want out of life, then focusing daily on the small moments and cultivating positive emotions is the way to go,” said Barbara Fredrickson, Ph.D., Kenan Distinguished Professor of Psychology in UNC’s College of Arts and Sciences and the principal investigator of the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory. “Those small moments let positive emotions blossom, and that helps us become more open. That openness then helps us build resources that can help us rebound better from adversity and stress, ward off depression and continue to grow.”

In the month long study, 86 participants were asked to submit daily “emotion reports,” rather than answering general questions like, “Over the last few months, how much joy did you feel?”

“Getting those daily reports helped us gather more accurate recollections of feelings and allowed us to capture emotional ups and downs,” said Fredrickson, a leading expert in the field of positive psychology.

Building up a daily diet of positive emotions does not require banishing [negative emotions](#), she said. The study helps show that to be happy, people do not need to adopt a “Pollyanna-ish” approach and deny the upsetting aspects of life.

“The levels of positive emotions that produced good benefits weren’t extreme. Participants with average and stable levels of positive emotions still showed growth in resilience even when their days included negative emotions.”

Fredrickson suggested focusing on the “micro-moments” that can help unlock one positive emotion here or there.

“A lot of times we get so wrapped up in thinking about the future and the past that we are blind to the goodness we are steeped in already, whether it’s the beauty outside the window or the kind things that people are doing for you,” she said. “The better approach is to be open and flexible, to be appreciative of whatever good you do find in your daily circumstances, rather than focusing on bigger questions, such as ‘Will I be happy if I move to California?’ or ‘Will I be happy if I get married?’”

In addition to Fredrickson, the study authors are Michael A. Cohn, Ph.D., of the University of California San Francisco; Stephanie L. Brown, Ph.D., from the University of Michigan; Joseph A. Mikels, Ph.D., of Cornell University; and Anne M. Conway, Ph.D., of the University of Pittsburgh.

Fredrickson is the author of the book “Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity and Thrive” (Crown Publishing, 2009).

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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