

Social pursuits linked with increased life satisfaction

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Credit: Association for Psychological Science

If you want to give a little boost to your life satisfaction a year from now, you may want to try socially-focused strategies over strategies that involve nonsocial pursuits, according to research published in

Psychological Science, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

"Our research showed that people who came up with 'well-being' strategies that involved other people were more satisfied with their lives one year later—even after taking into account that they were marginally happier to begin with," explains psychological scientist Julia Rohrer of the University of Leipzig, lead author on the study. "In contrast, people who came up with strategies that did not explicitly involve others remained, on average, as satisfied as they were."

Rohrer and coauthors David Richter, Martin Brümmer, Gert G. Wagner, and Stefan C. Schmukle examined data from a subsample of the German Socio-Economic Panel Study, a nationally representative survey of German adults. In 2014, participants in this sample reported how satisfied they were with life, providing a rating from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). They also reported how satisfied they thought they would be in 5 years and described the strategies they could take to ensure sustained [life satisfaction](#) in the future. One year later, the participants again rated their current level of [life satisfaction](#).

Of the 1178 participants, 596 made a general statement (e.g., "there is not much I could change") or expressed an idea that did not entail individual action (e.g., "different politics would improve life"), whereas 582 reported a specific strategy. These two groups showed no substantive differences in life satisfaction over time.

Rohrer and colleagues further examined the data from the 582 participants who actually described specific strategies. Of these, 184 mentioned approaches centered on some form of social engagement (e.g., "helping others," "spend more time with family," "spend more time with friends"), while 398 described some form of nonsocial strategy

(e.g., "stop smoking").

Analyses revealed that individuals who described a social [strategy](#) showed increased life satisfaction one year later, whereas those who reported nonsocial strategies showed relatively constant levels.

Data reflecting how much time participants spent on various activities indicated that time spent socializing with family, friends, and neighbors helped to explain the boost in life satisfaction one year later.

Rohrer notes that additional research, including experimental studies and longitudinal studies with multiple follow-up assessments, will help to illuminate why social strategies seem to improve life satisfaction and nonsocial strategies do not.

The results do suggest that spending more time with others may be the more promising avenue toward increased well-being, the researchers conclude.

"Many people are interested in becoming happier, but there is a lack of evidence regarding the long term effects of pursuing happiness through various types of activities. After all, there's no guarantee that trying to become happier doesn't make you more miserable in the end," Rohrer says. "I think our study partly fills that gap in the literature, although more research with a longitudinal perspective is certainly needed."

More information: Julia M. Rohrer et al. Successfully Striving for Happiness: Socially Engaged Pursuits Predict Increases in Life Satisfaction, *Psychological Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0956797618761660](#)

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