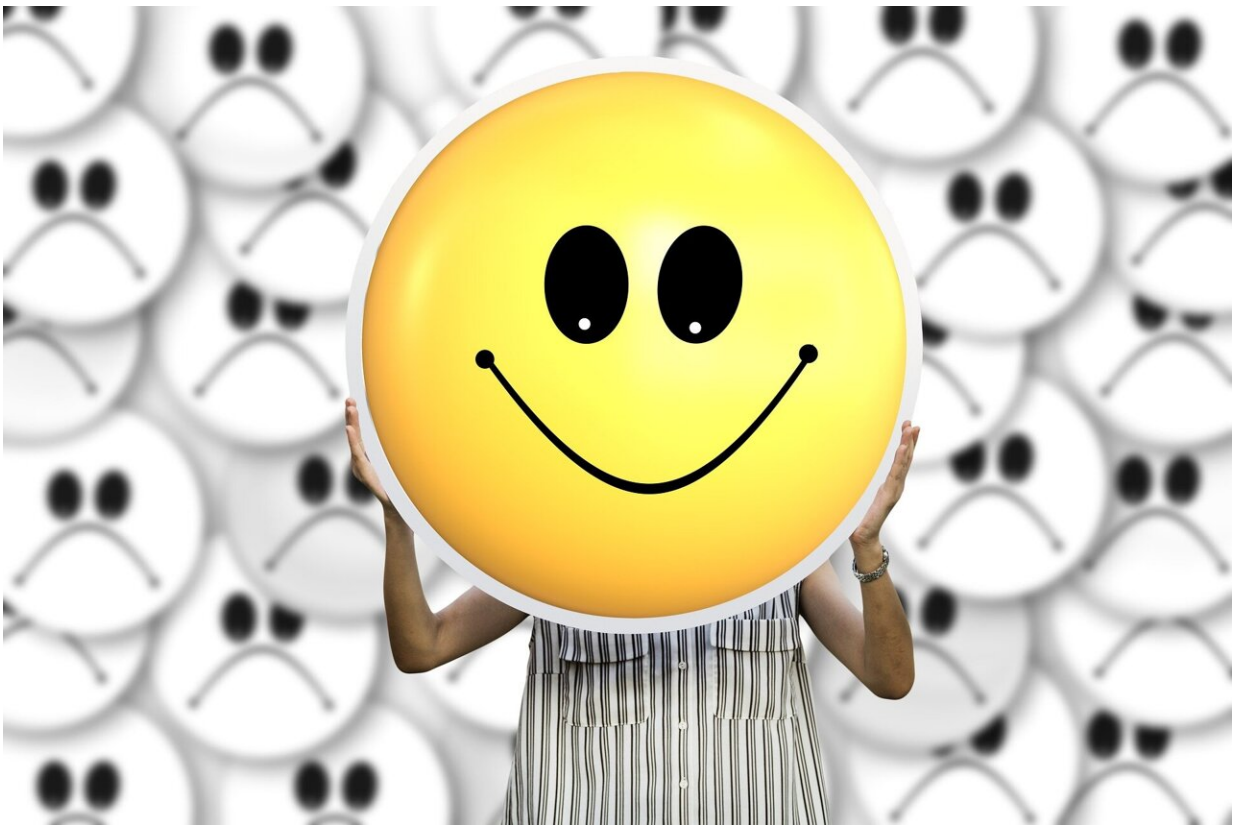


Survey of recent research suggests common strategies to boost happiness lack rigorous testing

July 21 2023, by Bob Yirka



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A pair of psychologists at the University of British Columbia has found that evidence backing up claims that certain therapies or activities can

boost happiness is lacking in rigor. In their study, reported in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*, Dunigan Folk and Elizabeth Dunn analyzed nearly 500 research papers describing studies looking into the benefits of happiness-boosting programs.

Over the past several decades, programs, therapies and even supplements have been sold with claims that adherence to their system will lead to happiness. But whether any or all of them actually come through has remained up for debate. In recent years, teams of scientists have conducted research on some of these systems attempting to find out if they work. But, as Folk and Dunn found, their findings are anything but clear.

To test research into [happiness](#)-boosting systems, the researchers first narrowed down the choices of systems to three major types using Google to find which were the most popular: getting back to nature, meditating and [mindfulness](#), and exercise. They then searched the literature to find research papers and projects looking into one or more of these types.

They found 494 papers that described 532 studies. The researchers then went through each paper, looking most specifically for experiments or other processes that yielded assessable data that could be used to measure the effectiveness of a given approach and could only find 57 of them.

The clear lack of results, they suggest, shows that too little research has been done to determine with any certainty whether any of the strategies work as promised. They also note that the lack of strong research on the topic has left consumers with little understanding of whether such systems work, and perhaps more important, if any of them will work for them.

They conclude that more strenuous research is required to determine

which systems work—with an emphasis on which systems work best for which groups of people.

More information: Dunigan Folk et al, A systematic review of the strength of evidence for the most commonly recommended happiness strategies in mainstream media, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-023-01651-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01651-4)

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