

# The How Of Happiness: A Short, Insightful Summary

**Quick Summary:** In the book *The How of Happiness*, Sonja Lyubomirsky debunks the myth that a new job or marriage could make us happy forever. It is because the joy of better life conditions does not exceed 10% of our happiness. She also shares simple ways to boost our daily happiness through behavior changes called positive interventions.

*Trying to become happier by changing external circumstances—even if they were not terrible to begin with—is unlikely to deliver great results.*

— Sonja Lyubomirsky

Want to learn some science-backed happiness-boosting strategies in a smart and fun way? Then get this is your “how to get happy” book:

**[The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want.](#)**

## What Is “The How Of Happiness” About?

The *How of Happiness* is about how human happiness works scientifically, what to focus on to actually boost your happiness,

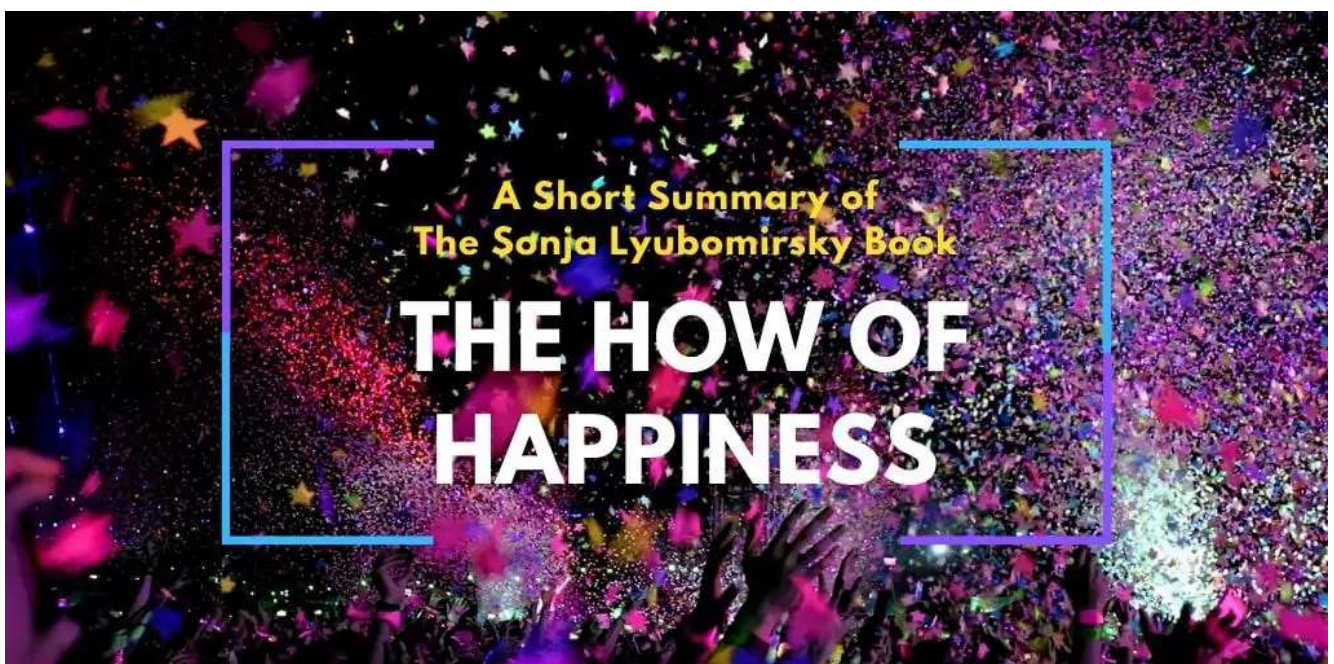
and how to let go of [the happiness myths that keep us miserable](#).

- Humans quickly adjust to happy events, and their happiness begins to decline soon after. So, stop believing that you would be infinitely happy if you achieved huge success, married a beautiful person, got a lucrative promotion, or won the jackpot.
- People also do not appear to remain as depressed following terrible situations as they think. So, let go of the notion that you will be sad forever if you are fired from your 10-year-old job, get divorced, or lose a loved one to death.

The book is based on cutting-edge research from positive psychology experts — people who study what makes us happier and mentally stronger, and how to have a good life.

Its author, [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#), is a professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside. She is ex-Harvard and ex-Stanford.

[Find a PDF of this summary of The How of Happiness in the Final Words.]



# The How Of Happiness Summary (In 9 Insights)

## 1. Three Easy Ways To Boost Your Daily Happiness: Mindfulness, Savoring, And Flow.

Here is how each of these practices can increase your happiness.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is being attentive to the present moment with no judgment.

Highly mindful people are sharply aware of their “here & now” and are more likely to flourish in their personal and professional lives, and score on the positive side of mental health.

Learn how to practice [Mindfulness In 7 Steps \(Beginner's Guide\)](#).

### Savoring

Savoring is trying to feel and admire, enjoy, and extend our present positive experiences to the fullest.

Those who savor the things they have in their life are happier people. We should let ourselves truly appreciate the beauty and meaning in the things we are surrounded with.

Learn how to [enhance your savoring skills](#).

### Flow

Flow is a state of deep absorption in an activity, with such intense focus that we lose the sense of time.

Being in a state of flow can be rewarding in itself and can make us significantly happier.

Learn [how to get into “Flow” at work](#).

## 2. Marriage Can Give Us A Happiness Boost That Lasts ~2 Years.

A famous study on marriage shows the [happiness boost of marriage](#) only lasts for an average of 2 years.

Though people do receive an emotional boost from highly positive events such as getting married, these initial boosts do not last indefinitely (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener, 2003), as people tend to adapt to their life circumstances over time (i.e., to experience [hedonic adaptation](#); Lyubomirsky, 2011).

A marriage, or any other intimate relationship, that has entered the phase of *hedonic adaptation*, makes one feel bored, dissatisfied, and neglected, and they stop paying attention to their partner. It is a crucial factor fuelling divorce or breakup.

If after about two years, married couples return to their baseline happiness, then *what are the secrets of keeping a marriage happy and satisfying?*

**One secret behind happy and fulfilling marriages is how a couple responds to each other's successes.**

If they revel in being happy at their counterpart's successes, it creates a major uptick in their relationship satisfaction.

So, if there's good news to share, what matters is they are happy *as if it were their own* success, not the other person's. Not when they quip, "I'm so happy for you," but when they exclaim, "I'm so happy!"

Moreover, studies show that couples who *idealize each other* are less likely to lose love and satisfaction in their relationship.

(**Idealizing** means emphasizing and promoting the strengths and virtues while minimizing the weaknesses and flaws.)

Idealizing one's spouse can also work as a **self-fulfilling prophecy**, a psychological theory that says beliefs eventually turn real.

- **Being Single**

Studies show that single people are *no less* happy than and enjoy as great happiness as married people. Singles find their life's meaning in other social relationships, like friends, partners, relatives, groups, and hobbies.

### 3. Positive Aging Strategies Can Boost Happiness In Old Age.

It may surprise you that youth and early adulthood are *not* the sunniest times of our lives.

What research conclusively confirms is *that older people are actually happier* and more satisfied with their lives than younger people.

**Happiness increases as we age**, after around 40 years, and peaks after 60 years.

One key strategy for older people to get happier is to spend more time **reminiscing** — which is the act of retrieving autobiographical memories.

What reminiscing does is breed positive feelings and make the person feel more loved and protected.

The more time the seniors spend remembering their old times, the more positivity they add to their mood, morale, and self-esteem.

Find out how to grow old gracefully.



Happiness Strategies From The How of Happiness

## 4. Following A Faith Or Religion Can Actually Make Us Happier.

- *Religious people tend to have more security and **meaning in life**.*
- Actively practicing divinity or spirituality is linked to better physical health, more pro-social behavior, and being more successful at keeping away from unhealthy behaviors such as smoking.
- Those who are religious are happier, healthier, and cope better when they fall into bad times. It may be because of the social support of their religious group.

## 5. Money Can Make Us Happier, But Only Up To A Certain Point.

*What about using money to buy happiness?*

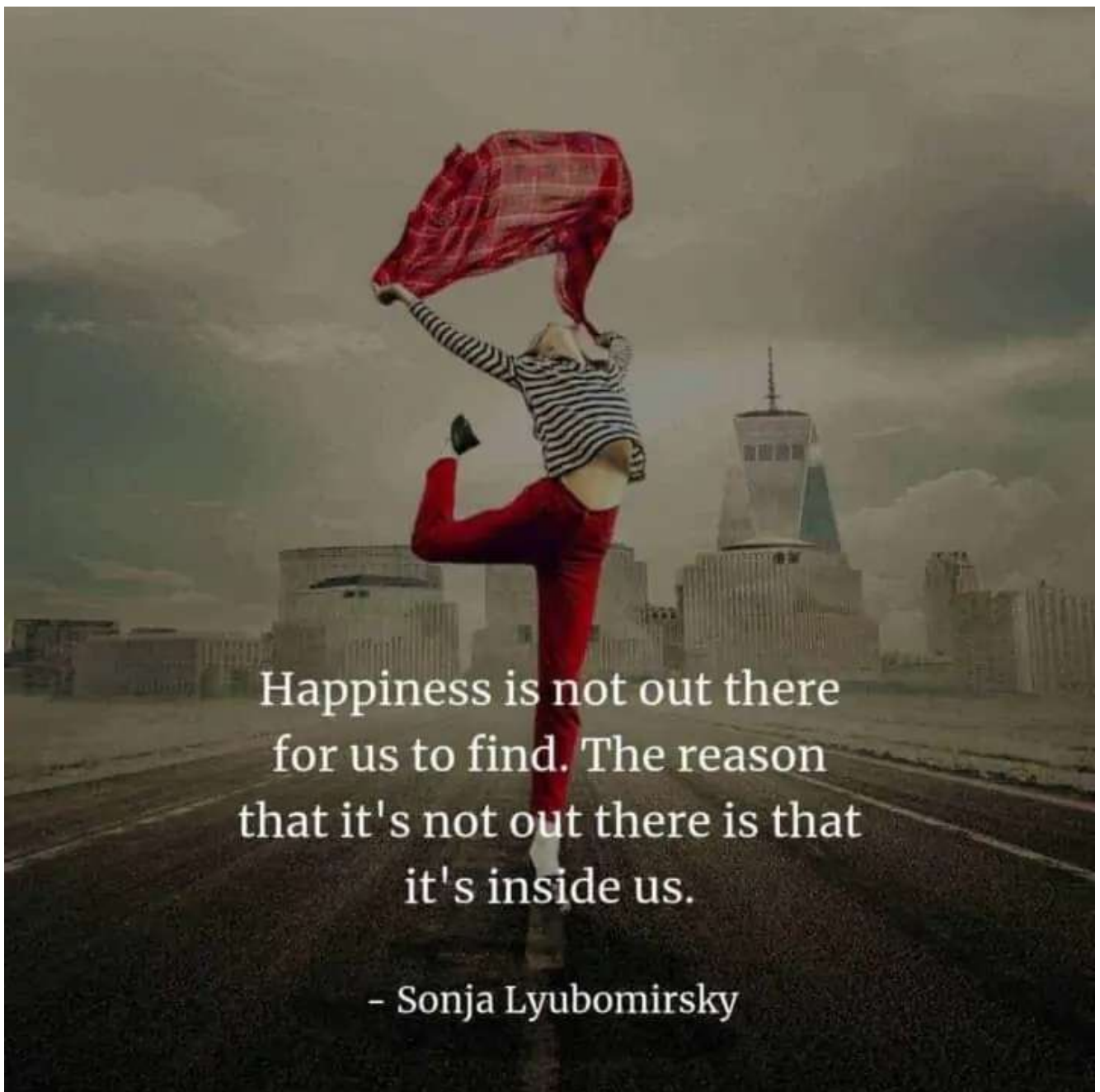
- Research shows that as long as you meet your basic needs, it's how you spend your money — not how much you possess — that influences your happiness more. The key is not in how financially successful you are, but what you do with it and how you deal it out.
- While on money and happiness, we must note humans are prone to hedonic adaptation. [Hedonic adaptation](#) is the notion that after positive (or negative) events, followed by an increase in positive (or negative) feelings, people return to a relatively stable, baseline level of *affect* (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006).
- So, if you keep on amassing wealth for the sake of it, it will not make you happier and happier — but less and less happy. Because you rapidly get used to that wealth.
- In short, money makes us happier, *but only till* our basic needs are met, and thereafter, when we spend it in certain happiness-boosting ways.

Learn these [7 Science-Based Truths About Money And Happiness](#).

## **6. Buying Experiences Can Give Us More Happiness Than Buying Things.**

Research finds it is *not the things* that keep us happy for long, but our experiences. Things we collect lie outside us, while our experiences nest inside us.

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Happiness is not out there  
for us to find. The reason  
that it's not out there is that  
it's inside us.

- Sonja Lyubomirsky

sonja lyubomirsky quote pic by Happiness India Project

Experiences are superior to goods and assets in making us happier because:

- *First*, most of the stuff we buy doesn't change much after we have bought them. We adapt to them a great deal faster. *Note the word: Adapt.* This is the **hedonic adaptation** we talked about earlier.
- *Second*, an experience is in itself more social. We are more likely to share and relive our fond memories with others – much more than our stuff.



- The *third* reason experiences make us happier is that we are less likely to compare them to those of others. You don't usually claim your holiday happiness was bigger than your friend's, do you?
- It does not take us long to start feeling that our prized acquisitions have been there forever. In time, they grow old and dull, and we get eager to replace them with new shiny things we'd again get adapted to soon.
- In contrast, experiences grow in value and joy as time passes. A fun-filled weekend, a lovely dinner, or a meaningful conversation can get embossed into our memories and bring happiness every time we revisit them.

## 7. Charity Or Philanthropy (Called Altruism) Increases Our Happiness.

Altruism is an action or behavior that benefits another person.

More specifically, we are being **altruistic** when we act out of concern for others without expecting any reward.

- Charity and altruism make us doubly happy. With altruism, *both the giver and the receiver* feel happier.
- When we give freely, we not only feel more positive about ourselves but also about those who receive – that they are worthy of our kindness and respect.
- When we're charitable, we actively go out to reduce the distresses of poverty and suffering in the world. In the process, we distract ourselves from our own petty problems, gain a greater appreciation for our good fortune, and step away from our worries.

Altruism is the opposite of **selfishness**.

## 8. Setting Goals And Striving For Success Can Bring Us Happiness.

All of us have [goals in life](#) that define us.

- When we pursue our life goals, it adds structure and purpose to our lives. They [raise our self-esteem](#) and self-confidence and make us creative and productive. Most often, each of our major life goals is made up of many smaller goals.
- When we achieve these small goals, each makes us happier. It starts a positive feedback loop. Those many moments of small joys now drive us toward our bigger goals.
- So you see, when we feel happy and good while striving towards our major life goals, we are more likely to keep working at it. Thus, happier people have greater chances of becoming successful.
- *Happiness comes before success and drives it.*

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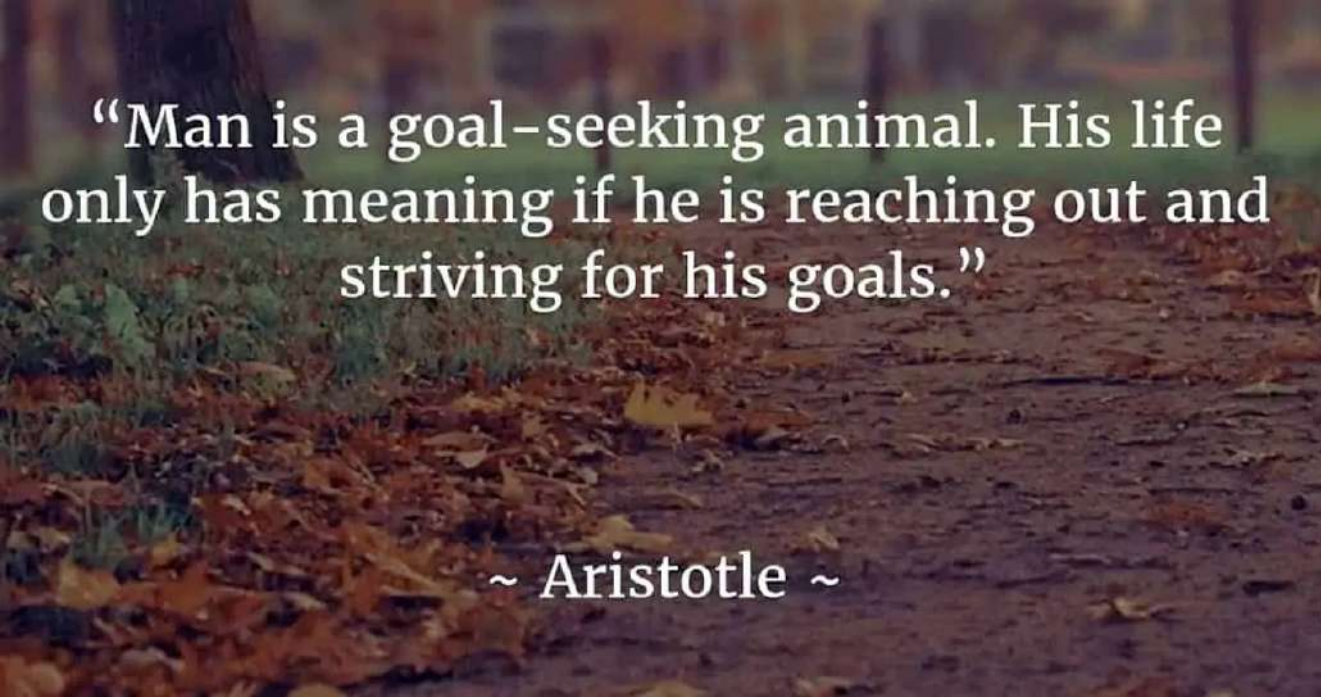
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“Man is a goal-seeking animal. His life only has meaning if he is reaching out and striving for his goals.”

~ Aristotle ~

## 9. Expressing Gratitude For Things That You Receive Raises Your Joy.

- Those who are routinely **grateful** are **more energetic and optimistic**, have better mental and physical health, have better relationships, and are high on happiness.
- Feeling regularly grateful can bring us a bunch of benefits for physical and mental health.
- **Eight Reasons Gratitude Makes You Happier:**
  1. Gratitude encourages morality
  2. It raises self-worth and self-esteem
  3. It helps prevent hedonic adaptation
  4. It helps to **stop comparing yourself** to others
  5. It fosters the savoring of positive experiences
  6. It may reduce feelings of anger, resentment, and greed
  7. It can help you cope better with stressful and traumatic events
  8. help build new social bonds and strengthen existing ones

Lyubomirsky writes:

*They also tend to be more helpful and empathetic, more spiritual and religious, more forgiving, and less materialistic...[and] less likely to be depressed, anxious, lonely, envious, or neurotic.*

- Find out how to [build your gratitude muscle](#).
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# THE HOW OF HAPPINESS

A New Approach to  
Getting the Life You Want



*This much  
happiness  
—up to 40%—  
is within  
your power  
to change*



**Sonja Lyubomirsky**

*"A guide to sustaining your newfound contentment."* —PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

# 12 Happiness Activities From The How Of Happiness

We can create our happiness.

Forty percent of our happiness depends on the activities we do with intention. Experts call these activities **positive interventions**. We could call them **happiness interventions** or **happiness-boosing actions**.

Lyubomirsky lays down the following twelve interventions to do to increase our happiness:

1. Savoring life's joys
2. Learning to forgive
3. Expressing gratitude
4. Cultivating optimism
5. Nurturing relationships
6. Taking care of your body
7. Committing to your goals
8. Practicing acts of kindness
9. Developing strategies for coping
10. Practicing religion and spirituality
11. Doing more activities that truly engage you
12. Avoiding overthinking and social comparisons

These strategies above do not involve making major shifts to one's current life situations and can be used by anyone, whatever their genetic makeup.

A **positive intervention** (or happiness intervention) is an evidence-based, intentional act or series of actions (behavioral strategy) meant to increase (away from zero) that which causes or constitutes well-being and flourishing in non-clinical populations.

However, she does not decree to you to start practicing all twelve. Instead, she thoughtfully offers a [Person-Activity Fit Diagnostic scale](#) to find out which activities could be the best for your personality and asks you to pick from those your 4 best-fitting happiness strategies.

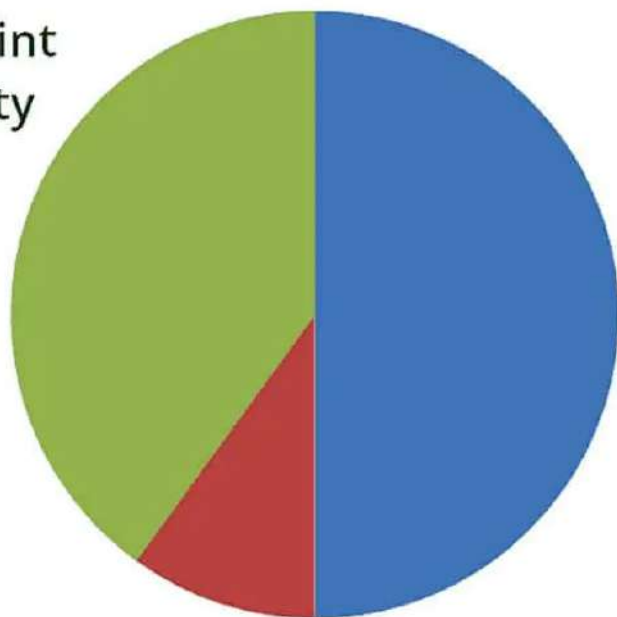
## What Determines Your Happiness

According to research, half of our happiness is determined by our genes, and most of the rest by our intentional activities, while the remaining by our circumstances. Professor Lyubomirsky simplifies the research with a pie chart that she calls *happiness pizza*.

Look at the picture below:

50% = Happiness Set Point  
40% = Intentional Activity  
10% = Circumstances

### The Happiness Pie Chart



What Determines Your Happiness: Happiness Pie-Chart

What *The Happiness Pie Chart* tells us is 50% of our happiness (the blue part in the figure) is determined by our genes, called the **happiness set point**. And 40% (the green area) comes from our **intentional activity**, while the rest 10% is decided by our **circumstances** or life events.

Sonja Lyubomirsky and her collaborator Ken Sheldon were given *more than a million dollars* by the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) to study and find out what makes happy people happy, and how to use that ken to raise the happiness of the general population.

In the preface, she writes: *“The star of The How of Happiness is science. To my knowledge, this is the first how-to-become-happier book authored by someone who has actually conducted research revealing how people can achieve a greater sense of happiness in their lives. Every suggestion that I offer is supported by scientific research.”*

Professor Lyubomirsky reveals in the opening pages this critical fact about happiness:

*Our happiness doesn't depend on our circumstances as much as we think.*

## **How Much Of Your Happiness Can You Control**

The fact is you can't do much about that 50% of your genetic set point. So, if your parents are happy, you have got a big shot at being happy. The reverse also holds true.

And data-wise, your life's happenings surprisingly make up only around 10% of your happiness. So, a lottery win or an unfortunate accident does not impact more than 10% of our overall happiness.

From the data, however, we get this highly practical insight to run away with:

*You have the power to control 40% of your happiness.*

You can make yourself happier by 40% directly through your actions and thoughts. You have to concur that forty percent is one



hefty figure. So much so that in fact, one of the book's original titles was *The 40 Percent Solution*.

*Remaking yourself as a happier person, a new person, is entirely in your hands, if you are willing to bring to bear some effort and commitment.*

— Sonja Lyubomirsky

## What Things Do Not Make You Happy

We live our whole lives with many happiness myths. We don't realize the list of what all do not make us happy is a long one.

If you think a new relationship, looking younger, losing weight, having more money, or a new job, will give you unending happiness, then you're dead wrong.

Positive psychology says, the circumstances and changes that happen to us, however great, don't affect our happiness too much.

We tend to settle back to our base level after any happiness boost we get from a positive life event. The reason behind this is a common quirk of human nature called [hedonic adaptation](#).

**Hedonic adaptation** means we quickly become habituated and inured to most of the changes in our lives.

Things we think are going to make us lastingly happy, actually do not make us lastingly happy. And the things we think are going to keep us forever sad, do not actually keep us forever sad.

Another myth about happiness is attaching an **If** or **When** to your happiness journey. Such as:

- I'll be happy **if** that happens, or

- I'll be happy **when** that happens.

*Both are wrong.*

## How Can You Measure Your Happiness

The book lays out a way to measure your happiness before you begin, and after you end, the process of adding happiness interventions to your life. After all, how else would you know if you're better off doing what it suggests?

The short four-question test Lyubomirsky and her colleagues devised for this is called the **Subjective Happiness Scale**. You could check out your level of general happiness [here](#).



## FAQs

- **Can You Be Happy After A Breakup Or Divorce?**

Yes. When a committed relationship comes apart, people falsely think they can never be happy again. However, research shows as soon as four years pass after the break of a

troubled relationship, people are significantly happier than they ever had been during the marriage.

- **Do You Need A Partner To Be Happy?**

No. While many believe not having a partner would make them miserable forever, studies show single people are no less happy than married ones, and that singles have been found to enjoy great happiness and meaning in other relationships and pursuits.

- **Can You Be Happy Only When You Are Rich And Successful?**

Yes. When we reach a certain goal-post of prosperity and success, happiness proves elusive or short-lived. Life after success can become boring and empty. When that happens, we get a mix of negative emotions with positive ones, even depression. Many rich and successful people do not realize the key to buying happiness is not in how successful they are, but in what they do with that success.

## Final Words

### The How of Happiness Summary PDF

It is possible to be happier, and you can take steps to create more happiness in your life. But *why is this a book to read and re-read?* (By the way, her name is pronounced as **Son-yuh Lyu-bo-mirs-ky**)

1. *First*, its author Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D. in Social and Personality Psychology from Stanford University, is *one of the founding parents of the positive psychology movement*. The knowledge you get from this book is authoritative, right from the source of origin.

2. *Second*, the book serves facts and claims on happiness that are scientifically accurate. Every suggestion and conclusion you find here has backing in psychological research. The claims in this book are all backed by empirical data.
3. *Third*, it is written so you can *easily read, grasp, and remember*. For one, all the knowledge in the book appears as three crisply divided parts: I. How to Attain Real and Lasting Happiness, II. Happiness Activities, III. Secrets to Abiding Happiness.

This book is your go-to book on “how to happiness your way” to more fulfillment and joy in life.

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## Find True Happiness: Best Summary of “The Happiness Trap”

This summary of Russ Harris’s “The Happiness Trap” will tell you how to free yourself from depression, anxiety, and self-doubt, and build a meaningful life.



The Happiness Blog

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*Author Bio:* Written and reviewed by **Sandip Roy** — a medical doctor, psychology writer, and happiness researcher, who writes on mental well-being, happiness, positive psychology, and philosophy (especially [Stoicism](#)).

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• [Our Happiness Story!](#)

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**Revisit A Section:**

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Savoring

Flow

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