

# Happiness Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Happiness will teach you how our desire for it developed, what its benefits are, why money actually hurts our happiness and where it really comes from, and how Western countries could easily increase their happiness with a few changes.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Richard Layard has been researching happiness since the 70s. His book *Happiness: Lessons From A New Science* came out in 2005. It is a holistic approach to happiness, meaning it explains lots of aspects of it, and doesn't just focus on where to find it, for example.

One of the 3 biggest lessons wasn't really new to me, but the other 2 were all the more shocking.

1. Our capability to feel happiness in the first place has evolved, we weren't always able to feel happy.
2. More money actually makes you less happy, unless you live in poverty.
3. One of the simplest ways for Western countries to increase happiness would be to raise taxes.

I know, right? All 3 of them make you go: "Whaaaaaaaaaaaat?"

That's why we should probably take a look at them in detail.

## Lesson 1: Our desire for happiness has evolved – it wasn't always there.

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Think about the last decision you made. Maybe it was to click on the "Read More" button of this summary. **Why did you do it?**

Let's say you liked the 1-sentence summary and the quote of the author, so you wanted to learn more.

By knowing more about happiness, you would become a smarter person and therefore, more likely to achieve your goals, whatever they may be – and thus, **happier**.

**All of our decisions ultimately come down to whether the result makes us happier, or not.**

Now this is old news, but get this: It wasn't always this way. Over thousands of years, our brains developed the ability to feel happiness.

Researchers have learned this when taking real-time EEG scans of the brain during different activities. The parts that lit up in states of happiness belonged to the left side of the prefrontal cortex – a fairly new part of the brain, which is also where the neocortex sits.

The fact that this part of the brain has only developed recently in human history, makes happiness an adaptive trait, meaning its partially genetic and a driver of survival.

**I knew that stress and fear were survival mechanisms, but now you can add happiness to the tool box, which is crazy.**

It makes sense of course, after all, friendships, sex and good food makes us happy and all these things were crucial to the survival of our ancestors.

However, thinking that **the drive behind all of our decisions is yet another remaining survival tool** from the past is kinda scary, don't you think?

## Lesson 2: Beyond a certain threshold, more money makes you less happy.

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Surprise surprise, **money doesn't make us happy**. While this is old news, there are some interesting facts around it in this summary.

First, being in poverty crushes your happiness. Naturally, getting more money until your basic survival is ensured makes you happier. The summary says **\$20,000 per year**, but I assume that figure varies a lot, depending on where you live.

Getting out of poverty in Asia requires less money than it does in Europe.

\$75,000 per year is a common figure for Western countries. But this even varies across states, ranging from \$65,000 to \$122,000 per year inside the US alone.

**After that, more money will do no good.**

Actually, it might hurt. How happy you are about the number on your bank account **depends heavily on who your neighbor is**.

Let's say you are promoted to a whopping \$250,000 per year salary job and move to Beverly Hills. Your new salary won't do you any good here, because you're surrounded by millionaires. If everyone around you makes more than you, you'll be miserable from all the comparing.

Each additional dollar becomes a little dopamine hit, and **you'll get addicted to chasing money**. Instead, try to exit the rat race early, by focusing on what really matters in your life: family, health, meaningful work and close friends.

## Lesson 3: Countries should increase taxes to make people happier.

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Following from lesson 2, a simple way for Western countries to increase their populations happiness would be to **raise taxes progressively**.

A progressive tax system makes people who earn more pay more taxes than others, redistributing the wealth equally. This is supposed to increase overall happiness, due to two things:

1. **Chasing that next hit that comes with another raise becomes much harder and therefore less attractive.**
2. **Comparing yourself to others becomes less of an issue, because the desire to compete is diminished.**

Initially it sounds counterintuitive, but if you think about it it makes sense. Sadly, so far, Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan country, is the only country that focuses on happiness as their main statistic – they measure Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

However, a lot of countries are taking steps in the right direction, with more flexible work hours, better support for parents and remote jobs reducing commutes, which hurt our happiness.

## Happiness Review

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At first glance this summary seemed to hold not many new insights, especially when you've already read The Happiness Hypothesis, but as I read on I found the 3 shocking lessons I just shared with you.

If you're new to all this happiness research, I think this summary and book could be the perfect starter.

After *Happiness: Lessons From A New Science* you can dive deeper into happiness research by learning about specific topics and tools, which will help you get there. Further recommended books: *Learned Optimism*, *Mindset*, and *Better Than Before*.

## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- How studies about happiness are usually conducted, and why that's wrong

- What winning an Oscar has to do with living longer
- Why economic growth and material wealth don't make us happier
- The 7 values our happiness most depends on
- Which step you can take to leave the rat race today

## **Who would I recommend the Happiness summary to?**

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The 22 year old with a Master's degree, who's rushing to become a banker at Goldman Sachs, the 42 year old father with a 6-figure income, who's depressed because his neighbor just got a pool, and every politician in the world.

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