

# Psychological Wellbeing

Subtitle

Tim knew it wasn't going to be his day when he got stuck in traffic behind a slow-moving farm truck. How could the driver dawdle like that? Didn't he have anything of any importance to do? Things didn't get any better when Tim arrived on campus and discovered the library didn't have the books he needed. He could almost feel the tension rising.

"I need that material to finish my paper," he thought to himself. He knew that meant he wouldn't be able to get his paper done early, and that meant he wouldn't have the time he wanted to revise the paper. He wanted it to be a first-class paper. This time Tim wanted to get a better grade than his roommate, Luis. Although Luis didn't know it, Tim felt they were in competition and that Luis was always trying to better him whether academically or just playing cards.

"In fact," Tim mused to himself, "I feel like I'm in competition with everyone, no matter what I'm doing."



# The As, Bs, and Ds of Coronary Heart Disease

Many of us experience these sorts of feelings at one time or another, but for some people they represent a pervasive, characteristic set of personality traits known as the Type A behavior pattern.

The Type A behavior pattern is a cluster of behaviors involving hostility, competitiveness, time urgency, and feeling driven. In contrast, the Type B behavior pattern is characterized by a patient, cooperative, noncompetitive, and nonaggressive manner. It's important to keep in mind that Type A and Type B represent the ends of a continuum, and most people fall somewhere in between the two endpoints. Few people are purely a Type A or a Type B.

The importance of the Type A behavior pattern lies in its links to coronary heart disease. Men who display the Type A pattern develop coronary heart disease twice as often and suffer significantly more fatal heart attacks than do those classified as having the Type B pattern. Moreover, the Type A pattern predicts who is going to develop heart disease at least as well as—and independently of—any other single factor, including age, blood pressure, smoking habits, and cholesterol levels in the body

# The As, Bs, and Ds of Coronary Heart Disease

Hostility is the key component of the Type A behavior pattern that is related to heart disease. Hostility produces excessive physiological arousal in stressful situations. That arousal, in turn, results in increased production of the hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine as well as increases in heart rate and blood pressure. Such an exaggerated physiological response ultimately produces an increased incidence of coronary heart disease.

# Psychological Aspects of Cancer

Hardly any disease is feared more than cancer. Most people think of cancer in terms of lingering pain, and being diagnosed with the disease is typically viewed as receiving a death sentence. Cancer remains the **second leading cause of death** after coronary heart disease.

Certain cells in the body become altered and multiply rapidly in an uncontrolled fashion. As those cells grow, they form tumors; if left unchecked, the tumors suck nutrients from healthy cells and body tissue and ultimately destroy the body's ability to function properly. Some research suggests that the emotional responses of cancer patients to their disease may affect its course. For example, some findings show that a "fighting spirit" leads to better coping. On the other hand, there is little evidence that long-term survival rates are better than for patients with less-positive attitudes. It is possible that positive emotional responses may help generate specialized "killer" cells that help control the size and spread of cancerous tumors. Conversely, negative emotions may suppress the ability of those cells to fight tumors.

# Well-Being and Happiness

What makes for a good life?

Subjective well-being: people's sense of their happiness and satisfaction with their



## WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HAPPY PEOPLE?

- Happy people have high self-esteem. People who are happy like themselves. This is particularly true in Western cultures, which emphasize the importance of individuality. Furthermore, people who are happy see themselves as more intelligent and better able to get along with others than the average person is. In fact, they may hold positive illusions in which they hold moderately inflated views of themselves, believing that they are good, competent, and desirable.
- Happy people have a firm sense of control. They feel more in control of events in their lives, unlike those who feel they are the pawns of others and who experience learned helplessness.
- Happy individuals are optimistic. Their optimism permits them to persevere at tasks and ultimately to achieve more. In addition, their health is better

## WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HAPPY PEOPLE?

- Men and women generally are made happy by the same sorts of activities—but not always. Most of the time, adult men and women achieve the same level of happiness from the same things, such as hanging out with friends. But there are some differences: For example, women get less pleasure from being with their parents than men do. The explanation? For women, time spent with their parents more closely resembles work, such as helping them cook or pay the bills. For men, it's more likely to involve recreational activities, such as watching a football game with their fathers. The result is that men report being slightly happier than women.
- Happy people like to be around other people. They tend to be extroverted and have a supportive network of close relationships

Most people are at least moderately happy most of the time. In national as well as international surveys, people living in a wide variety of circumstances report being happy.



## DOES MONEY BUY HAPPINESS?

Research shows that although **winning the lottery** brings an initial surge in happiness, a year later, winners' level of happiness returns to what it was before they won. A similar pattern, although in reverse, occurs for people who have had extremely **serious injuries** in accidents, like losing a limb or becoming paralyzed: Initially they decline in happiness after the accident. But in the long run, most victims return to their prior levels of happiness after the passage of time.

People have a **general set point for happiness**, a marker that establishes the tone for one's life. Although specific events may temporarily elevate or depress one's mood (a surprise promotion or a job loss, for example), ultimately people return to their general level of happiness. Although it is not certain how people's happiness set points are initially established, some evidence suggests that the set point is determined at least in part by genetic factors. Specifically, identical twins who grow up in widely different circumstances turn out to have very similar levels of happiness

# Faces Scale

Faces Scale: "Which face comes closest to expressing how you feel about your life as a whole?"



20%



46%



27%



4%



2%



1%



0%

Most people's well-being set point is relatively high. Some 30% of people in the United States rate themselves as "very happy," and only 1 in 10 rate themselves "not too happy." Most people declare themselves to be "pretty happy". The scale illustrates that most people view their lives quite positively.

# Well-Being and Happiness

## The bottom line:

Money does not seem to buy happiness. Despite the ups and downs of life, most people tend to be reasonably happy, and they adapt to the trials and tribulations—and joys and delights—of life by returning to a steady-state level of happiness. That habitual level of happiness can have profound—perhaps life-prolonging— implications (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Hecht, 2007).