
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

What's the key to happiness?



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Georgina

And I'm Georgina.

Neil

That's a big smile on your face, Georgina! You seem happy today!

Georgina

I am, Neil. After all, what's the point in seeing **the glass half empty**?

Neil

Ah, so you're someone who tries to see **the glass half full** – you generally look at things in a positive way.

Georgina

I hope so! It may seem strange to be discussing happiness in the middle of a global pandemic but right now feeling happy is more important than ever.

Neil

Well then, it's lucky that happiness is the subject of this programme, Georgina. And while many things seem to be out of our control just now, there are small things we can do to feel better about life...

Georgina

...to feel less stressed, and maybe even a little happier.

Neil

You're talking like a Dane now, Georgina. Denmark, and in fact all the Nordic countries, are often listed as among the happiest places in the world.

Georgina

You know what would make me happy, Neil? – asking me a really good quiz question.

Neil

OK. Well, did you know that every year the UN publishes its Global Happiness Survey revealing the happiest countries in the world? It's based on factors like income, life expectancy and health. The Nordic countries often come in the top ten, but which country was rated the happiest in 2020? Was it:

- a) Iceland?,
- b) Denmark?, or
- c) Finland?

Georgina

Well, Neil, Denmark is famous for bacon, and nothing makes me happier than a bacon sandwich, so I'll say b) Denmark.

Neil

I like your thinking, Georgina! We'll find out the answer later, but you're certainly right to say that Denmark is considered one of the happiest countries in the world.

Georgina

Malene Rydahl, author of the bestselling book, *Happy as a Dane*, believes that aspects of Danish culture can help us improve our chances of happiness.

Neil

Here she is explaining what happiness means for her to BBC World Service programme, *The Conversation*. See if you can hear what she thinks:

Malene Rydahl

Well, I think we should be seeking **alignment** and I think we should practise **gratitude** and I think that we should be more conscious about how we relate to things that happen to us and how much we compare ourselves to others... I do think that what we need to focus on is the quality of our relationships.

Georgina

Did you hear Malene use the word **alignment**? She thinks there should be harmony between my true sense of who I am, what I think and how I relate to others. We should be in **alignment** – or in the correct relation, to those things.

Neil

Malene also thinks happiness comes from **gratitude** – feeling grateful and expressing thanks to other people.

Georgina

She recommends finding three things, no matter how small, to be grateful for every day.

Neil

Like... getting a good night's sleep, drinking a hot coffee... and having this chat with you, Georgina.

Georgina

Thanks, Neil, that's put a smile on my face! It may sound strange but doing this every day can really boost your happiness levels.

Neil

Malene also warns against seeking happiness in external things, as you can hear in this chat with BBC World Service's, The Conversation:

Malene Rydahl

If you seek happiness and you mistake it for pleasure, you will be running around like a little **hamster in a wheel** because it's never enough and because you will be very quickly the victim of the **hedonic treadmill**... and the hedonic treadmill is... you know, you want something, you think if you're more beautiful, if you get more power, if you get more money and fame and then you'll finally be happy... and then you get it and you get a small **satisfaction**.

Neil

According to Malene, chasing external pleasures like money and fame will leave you feeling like a **hamster on a wheel** – like someone who's always busy but never accomplishes anything useful or finishes what they start.

Georgina

She also says it's easy to become a victim of the **hedonic treadmill**. This is the idea that humans adapt to whatever level of happiness they achieve. As we make more money, meet the perfect boyfriend or whatever we desire, our expectations also increase, so we never find the happiness we hoped we would!

Neil

'Money can't buy happiness', as my grandma used to say.

Georgina

Right. In fact, it's probably the quality of our relationships, not external objects, that gives **satisfaction** – the pleasure we feel when we achieve something we wanted to.

Neil

Lots of useful tips there, Georgina, for feeling as happy as a Dane.

Georgina

A Dane, you say, Neil? So I got the correct answer?

Neil

In my quiz question I asked Georgina which Nordic country was rated happiest in the UN's 2020 global survey.

Georgina

I guessed, b) Denmark.

Neil

But in fact, Georgina, it was... c) Finland. I guess their bacon sandwiches are even better!

Georgina

OK, let's recap the vocabulary and start seeing the **glass half full** – looking at things in a positive way.

Neil

Happiness might be all about **alignment** – being in the correct relation to things.

Georgina

Or **gratitude** – being grateful and giving thanks.

Neil

Feeling like a **hamster on a wheel** means you're always busy doing things but without getting **satisfaction** - the pleasant feeling of achieving something you really wanted to.

Georgina

Finally, the reason happiness often escapes us may involve the **hedonic treadmill** - the human tendency to return to the same level of happiness after something very good or very bad has happened.

Neil

That's all for this programme. We hope it's lifted your spirits and given you some useful vocabulary as well.

Georgina

Remember to join us again soon for more interesting topics here at 6 Minute English. And if you like topical discussions and want to learn how to use the vocabulary found in headlines, why not try out our News Review podcast? You'll find programmes about many topics that will help to keep you entertained and learning at the same time. Don't forget you can download the app for free from the app stores. And of course, we are on most social media platforms. Bye for now!

Neil

Bye!

VOCABULARY

the glass is half full/empty

used to say that someone has a tendency to look at situations in a positive or negative way

alignment

correct position in relation to something else

gratitude

feeling grateful, expressing thanks to another person

hamster on a wheel

someone involved in activities that make them busy all the time but without ever achieving anything important or managing to finish a task

satisfaction

the pleasure you feel when you do something you wanted to do, or get something you wanted to get

hedonic treadmill

the human tendency to return to the same level of happiness after something very good or very bad has happened