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Can you make yourself happier?

The short answer is yes, and this should matter to you. Think about your current pursuits: Aren't they supposed to bring you a little closer to that cherished place? But people need help. So many strive to make more money, yet fail to reach any long term satisfaction. Others who invest in relationships can reap enormous rewards. Perhaps your grand-mother could have told you that. But you should consider other suggestions emerging from a new scientific field of inquiry.

The study of human strengths, virtues, and purpose is now the central focus of positive psychologists. This branch of psychology is committed to researching and understanding how life could be made more fulfilling, meaningful, and satisfying. Psychology has now broadened its focus beyond neuroses and psychoses, and many psychologists are asking what makes life worth living, what helps humans thrive, and what could help us (poor mortals) become happier.

What you, Oprah or Dr. Phil think is irrelevant. This is not self-help, and it is not based on personal anecdotes. Scientific research using hard data is showing that becoming happier is realizable in a sustainable way, not simply in carefully crafted moments. We have the capacity to make changes in our lives to feel better. But what are these changes? They're rather small. Tweaking the habits of your mind or your routine behaviors can make you lastingly happier, and the best part is that it can be done in less than 10 minutes a day. This is not psychoanalysis. Dozens of recent studies have shown that practicing brief exercises on a daily basis for only one week can result in long term changes in depression and happiness.

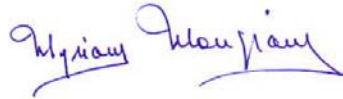
So why should you care? (Hang in here, because this is where the story gets really good.) Increases in happiness have been linked to boosts in energy, creativity, enhanced immune system functioning, positive relationships and a longer life! Positive emotions can help build resilience to the physiological ramifications of stress. And guess what... It can even change your brain.

There are several books by positive psychologists that summarize this research (Fredrickson, 2009; Lyubomirsky, 2008). You can also try it for yourself.

I'm a professor and clinical psychologist at York University in Toronto, Canada. I have studied the emotional realm of psychological functioning for over 25 years, and have recently turned my attention to positive psychology. The results of a previous study I have conducted on the effects of psychological exercises on mood have been very encouraging. This is a testimony from a participant that resonated with many others: "Doing this simple exercise helped me to feel more grateful and interested in my life. It reminded me of the small things in life that bring me joy, especially on days when I was feeling down."

Are you interested in finding potential ways to feel happier? CTV viewers are invited to visit my new online study www.ProjectHopeCanada.com (*Harnessing One's Personal Excellence -- HOPE*). We're looking at the benefits of short online exercises on mood.

Wishing you much happiness!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Myriam Mongrain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Dr. Myriam Mongrain

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