In the last few years, psychologists and researchers have been digging up hard data on a question previously left to philosophers: What makes us happy?

Researchers like the father-son team Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener, Stanford psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky, and ethicist Stephen Post have studied people all over the world to find out how things like money, attitude, culture, memory, health, altruism, and our day-to-day habits affect our well-being. The emerging field of positive psychology is bursting with new findings that suggest your actions can have a significant effect on your happiness and satisfaction with life. Here are 10 scientifically proven strategies for getting happy.

1. **Savor Everyday Moments**

Pause now and then to smell a rose or watch children at play. Study participants who took time to “savor” ordinary events that they normally hurried through, or to think back on pleasant moments from their day, “showed significant increases in happiness and reductions in depression,” says psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky.

2. **Avoid Comparisons**

While keeping up with the Joneses is part of American culture, comparing ourselves with others can be damaging to happiness and self-esteem. Instead of comparing ourselves to others, focusing on our own personal achievement leads to greater satisfaction, according to Lyubomirsky.

3. **Put Money Low on the List**

People who put money high on their priority list are more at risk for depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, according to researchers Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan. Their findings hold true across nations and cultures. “The more we seek satisfactions in material goods, the less we find them there,” Ryan says. “The satisfaction has a short half-life—it’s very fleeting.” Money-seekers also score lower on tests of vitality and self-actualization.

4. **Have Meaningful Goals**

“People who strive for something significant, whether it’s learning a new craft or raising moral children, are far happier than those who don’t have strong dreams or aspirations,” say Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener. “As humans, we actually require a sense of meaning to thrive.” Harvard’s resident happiness professor, Tal Ben-Shahar, agrees, “Happiness lies at the intersection between pleasure and meaning. Whether at work or at home, the goal is to engage in activities that are both personally significant and enjoyable.”

www.YesMagazine.org/happyscience

For an interactive version, plus citations

www.YesMagazine.org/posters

To buy or download a poster

Read more about how to be happy in the Winter 2009 issue of YES! Magazine. Sustainable Happiness

Back copies at YesMagazine.org/store

Related articles at YesMagazine.org/sustainablehappiness
Make altruism and giving part of your life, and be purposeful about it. Researcher Stephen Post says helping a neighbor, volunteering, or donating goods and services results in a “helper’s high,” and you get more health benefits than you would from exercise or quitting smoking. Listening to a friend, passing on your skills, celebrating others’ successes, and forgiveness also contribute to happiness, he says. Researcher Elizabeth Dunn found that those who spend money on others reported much greater happiness than those who spend it on themselves.