

Daily Union Article

Saturday, December 24

Title: Hope, Joy, and Happiness

I want to give a shout out to all those folks who have put up lights, decorations, and inflatables in their yard, on their porch and or on apartment balconies. Thank You! I really enjoy the Christmas lights and decorations we see around our community this time of year. It makes me smile and brings me joy. My family loves to go on our after-dark Christmas cruises around town, so I know it makes them happy, too.

Perhaps these folks don't realize how much they are helping others feel the cheer and joy the season brings to others while improving their overall well-being. I would be remiss if I didn't point out the large body of research that supports the impact hope and joy have on a person's level of happiness and well-being.

The pursuit of happiness is intrinsic to human nature. Just do an online book search on the subject and you will find books like "The How of Happiness", "Happier at Home", "A Happy You: Your Ultimate", and "The Book of Joy." There are even magazines dedicated to the prospect of experiencing joy and finding happiness! "Live Happy" and online magazines such as "Greater Good" are among the many you can find. Our human nature desires to be happy and when we feel we are in a "funk", there are a wide variety of tools we can use to change our perspective and give us a more positive approach to daily living.

In fact, University of California, Berkeley houses a center that focuses on research in the areas of psychology, sociology and neuroscience as it relates to well-being. The Greater Good Science Center was established in 2001 for the purpose of exploring the roots of happy and compassionate individuals. They look at the cognitive, physiological, emotional, and physical impact that happiness has on our overall health and well-being.

As a result of their ongoing research, they have identified six ways happiness is good for your health. Here is a summary of what they have discovered at Greater Good Science Center.

Happiness protects your heart. One study revealed that participants who were the happiest at the initial questionnaire, had lower heart rates three years later (lowered by 6 beats per minute) than the others in the initial group that did not rate their happiness level as high. This same happy, lower-heart-rate group had lower blood pressure, as well.

Happiness strengthens your immune system. Think about those in your family or among your friends that tend to have a grumpy disposition. Do some of them always seem to be getting sick? Research has found that there is a link between happiness and a stronger immune system. A 2003 study of 350 adults who voluntarily exposed themselves to the common cold (for compensation), were evaluated interviewed about their emotional state before, during, and after exposure. Following five days in

quarantine, the participants with the most positive emotions were less likely to have contracted a cold.

Happiness combats stress. We all know what too much stress does to our body, but do we recognize the long-term health effects of living with a high level of stress in our lives for long periods of time? Studies have found that stress not only affects us psychologically, but has biological implications as well. Our hormones and blood pressure are two of these effects. In happier people, these effects are tempered and help us recover more quickly. One study found that the happiest cohort of participants had 23% lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol than the least happy participants involved.

Happy people have fewer aches and pains. Being unhappy can literally be painful. Over time, happier people demonstrate a healthier lifestyle and improved well-being. Unhappy people tend to experience a decline in health and well-being over time. Another study indicates that positive emotions (happiness) can help minimize an increase in pain for those suffering from diseases such as arthritis or chronic pain.

Happiness combats disease and disability. Severe and long-term conditions as well as the shorter-term aches and pains can be faced head on more successfully by those with a happy disposition. In a 2008 study conducted in Australia, nearly 10,000 participants who reported themselves as happy and satisfied with life were found to be about 1.5 times less likely to have long-term health conditions two years later.

Happiness lengthens life. When I think about my husband's grandmother who lived to 102 years of age and my own grandma who lived to the age of 96, I can see how their disposition helped them reach their amazing ages. They signify to me that a long life is the best indicator of happiness. Research certainly supports that your disposition impacts your longevity. In their online magazine, Greater Good, the Greater Good Science Center reports that *"A 2010 study followed almost 7,000 people from California's Alameda County for nearly three decades, finding that the people who were more satisfied with life at the beginning were less likely to die during the course of the study."*

Source: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_ways_happiness_is_good_for_your_health

Many indicators point to a healthier and longer life for those who report high levels of hope, joy, and happiness. When we feel better emotionally and mentally, it transfers to all the systems of our body and helps improve our lives in ways we may not realize. Whether it's riding through neighborhoods looking at the beautiful Christmas lights, enjoying a feast with family and friends, or playing games in the evening with the kids, look for those things that give you the hope and joy that leads to happiness, not just during the holiday season, but the whole year through. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!