The word is out: positivity and happiness improve physical health. Research suggests that an individual’s positivity level predicts lower levels of stress-related hormones and increases feel-good chemicals in the brain. Positive emotions are related to lower blood pressure, less pain, fewer colds, and better sleep.

Research suggests that about 50 percent of your happiness is genetically predetermined, while circumstances—such as income, job status, and other material wealth—only account for about 10 percent of your happiness. This suggests that you have control over about 40 percent of your happiness with intentional activities.

There are many evidence-based strategies that can help increase happiness. Here are a few of our favorites:

Commit to a goal: Pursuing a goal provides you with a sense of purpose, gives you something to look forward to, and increases confidence and social connections. People who have strong dreams and aspirations are happier than folks who don’t.

Consider the following when setting a new goal:

- Choose a goal that is diverting, pleasurable, and meaningful to you. Superficial goals such as making money, seeking power, or pleasing others will not bring the type of healthy happiness you’re striving for.
- If you’re pursuing multiple goals, make sure they complement one another. If they conflict, you may end up frustrated and give up on all of them.

- Knowing which goal fits you best takes self-awareness. Check-in with yourself by asking “when I work toward this goal, am I becoming more of the person I want to be or less?”

Meditate: Meditation has multiple positive effects on a person’s emotions, stress, and physical health. Regular meditation sessions produce greater happiness and less anxiety and depression.

Physical Activity: Physical activity increases self esteem, mood-lifting hormones, and may provide an opportunity for social contact. In one study, aerobic exercise was just as effective at treating depression as was Zoloft.

The key is to find an exercise that fits your lifestyle, resources, and personality. Start where you are and build up—it’s better to exercise for 10 minutes than not at all.

Develop coping strategies: What if you feel like you have so many problems that trying to increase your happiness seems useless? Maybe you are in crisis, have lost a loved one, or your health has changed. Try some of these strategies for coping:

- Reach out to a social support group. Friends and other social supports allow you to share your feelings and feel that you belong.
- Write it out. Acknowledge that your situation may be painful. Then consider how you have grown during this difficult time. Personally significant experiences can often lead you to create a meaningful goal.
Magnesium, the Friendly Mineral

Did you know that many adults do not get enough daily magnesium? Magnesium plays an important role in metabolizing carbohydrates and may improve insulin response. Here are some delicious foods that are high in magnesium:

- Nuts
- Bananas
- Beans
- Oatmeal
- Brown rice
- Dark leafy vegetables

Are You Depressed?

Here are two questions that, when answered honestly, can give you an idea of whether or not you may be depressed.

1. During the past two weeks, have you been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?
2. During the past two weeks, have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

If you answered “yes” to either question, consider talking with your doctor about your options. There are many treatments that are effective in treating depression. One choice is talk therapy. Talk therapy gives you the chance to explore your thoughts and feelings and the effect they have on your behavior and mood. Understanding this can help you make positive changes by thinking and acting differently.

Websites for more information:

- http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Depression/

REFERENCES:
