

Happiness comes cheap - even for millionaires

A bar of chocolate, a long soak in the bath, a snooze in the middle of the afternoon, a leisurely stroll in the park. These are the things that make us the most happy, according to new research from The University of Nottingham.

In a study commissioned by the National Lottery, Dr Richard Tunney of the University's School of Psychology found that it's the simple things in life that impact most positively on our sense of well being.

The study compared the 'happiness levels' of lottery jackpot winners with a control group, using a 'Satisfaction with Life Scale' developed by the University of Illinois. Respondents were asked how satisfied they were in relation to different elements of their life, their different mood states explored, how often they treated themselves and what form this took.

Surprisingly, it wasn't the flashy cars and diamond jewellery that upped the jackpot winners' happiness quotient. It was the listening to music, reading a book, or enjoying a bottle of wine with a takeaway that really made the difference.

Dr Tunney said: "Modern-day pressures take their toll on everyday happiness. As a result we try to make ourselves feel better and happier through personal rewards and treats. We've all heard the saying 'a little bit of what you fancy does you good', and treating yourself is the ideal way to keep spirits lifted when you're down in the dumps.

"As lottery jackpot winners are on the whole happier than non-winners — 95 per cent claim they are positive about their life compared to 71 per cent of people in the control group — we researched the treats they rewarded themselves with to see what could influence their mood state."

The survey contrasted cost-free activities, such as walking and snoozing, with expensive ones like overseas holidays. It asked how frequently they might purchase 'staying in treats' — like a bottle of wine — and how often they bought themselves items like shoes, mobile phones and DVDs.

The research found that happy people — whether lottery jackpot winners or not — liked long baths, going swimming, playing games and enjoying their hobby. Those who described themselves as less happy didn't choose the cost-free indulgences. They rewarded themselves with CDs, cheap DVDs and inexpensive meals out instead.

"While buying sports cars, giving up work and going on exotic holidays is out of reach for most of us, there are small lessons we can learn from society's happiest people to help improve our quality of life," Dr Tunney added.

"It appears that spending time relaxing is the secret to a happy life. Cost-free pleasures are the ones that make the difference — even when you can afford anything that you want."

Source: University of Nottingham

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