

10 Simple, Science-Backed Ways To Be Happier Today

By Belle Beth Cooper

4. Spend time with friends and family--don't regret it on your deathbed

Staying in touch with friends and family is one of the top five regrets of the dying. If you want more evidence that it's beneficial for you, I've found some research that proves it can make you happier right now.

Social time is highly valuable when it comes to improving our happiness, even for introverts. Several studies have found that time spent with friends and family makes a big difference to how happy we feel, generally.

I love the way Harvard happiness expert Daniel Gilbert explains it:

*We are happy when we have family, we are happy when we have friends and almost **all the other things we think make us happy are actually just ways of getting more family and friends.***

George Vaillant is the director of a 72-year study of the lives of 268 men.

In an interview in the March 2008 newsletter to the Grant Study subjects, Vaillant was asked, "What have you learned from the Grant Study men?" Vaillant's response: "That the only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people."

He shared insights of the study with Joshua Wolf Shenk at *The Atlantic* on how the men's social connections made a difference to their overall happiness:

The men's relationships at age 47, he found, predicted late-life adjustment better than any other variable, except defenses. Good sibling relationships seem especially powerful: 93 percent of the men who were thriving at age 65 had been close to a brother or sister when younger.

In fact, a study published in the *Journal of Socio-Economics* states that your relationships are worth more than \$100,000:

Using the British Household Panel Survey, I find that an increase in the level of social involvements is worth up to an extra £85,000 a year in terms of life satisfaction. Actual changes in income, on the other hand, buy very little happiness.

I think that last line is especially fascinating: *Actual changes in income, on the other hand, buy very little happiness.* So we could increase our annual income by hundreds of thousands of dollars and still not be as happy as if we increased the strength of our social relationships.

The Terman study, which is covered in *The Longevity Project*, found that relationships and how we help others were important factors in living long, happy lives:

We figured that if a Terman participant sincerely felt that he or she had friends and relatives to count on when having a hard time then that person would be healthier. Those who felt very loved and cared for, we predicted, would live the longest.

Surprise: our prediction was wrong... Beyond social network size, the clearest benefit of social relationships came from helping others. Those who helped their friends and neighbors, advising and caring for others, tended to live to old age.

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