

Your hands-on guide to reducing stress, being happier,
and living a more fulfilling life

Happiness FOR DUMMIES®



W. Doyle Gentry, PhD

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®



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Happiness For Dummies®

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Dr. Gentry is available for speaking engagements and workshops. Interested readers may contact him via e-mail at HappyUBE@aol.com.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to the countless numbers of people who, in one way or another, have brought happiness into my life.

Author's Acknowledgments

I want to thank a number of fellow collaborators without whose efforts writing this book would not have been possible or nearly as enjoyable. As always, I want to express my appreciation to my agent, Maura Kye, of the Denise Marcil Literary Agency. Once again, she has served my interests well!

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Lastly, I want to thank my loving family — Catherine, Chris, and Rebecca — for their unending support for my life's work and, more important, for bringing so much happiness into my life each and every day.

I believe that happiness is the only really important goal, and yet we are all dummies when it comes to pursuing it in our everyday lives. If this book brings even one additional moment of happiness to the life of a single reader, then my time spent on this project will have been well worth it.

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Introduction

Happiness is an important part of life — no less than anger, sadness, and fear. It begins with life itself: What mother doesn't recognize the look of happiness on the face of her newborn? Human beings are wired with an innate, neurological potential for happiness, but whether this potential eventually becomes a reality depends on how we choose to live our lives. In other words, happiness isn't an accident, and it isn't a gift from the gods — it's the gift you give yourself!

Unlike Shangri-La, a mythical paradise on Earth, happiness is not confined to a particular place, nor is it the result of any one specific activity or life circumstance. Happiness is a personal state of physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being that you can experience anywhere at any time. This morning, for example, before I began to work on this book, I spent a few happy moments sitting in my driveway quietly watching my two basset hounds, Max and Dixie, experiencing another day through the many divergent smells on a crisp fall morning in Virginia.

If you're like me, you're far too passive when it comes to experiencing happiness. You wait for it to find you instead of exercising your right to pursue it. It's *because* most people are passive when it comes to happiness that happiness seems so elusive! Face it: We live in proactive times. People around the world don't *wait* for freedom — they fight for it. Wealth is no longer something you have to inherit (despite what Paris Hilton may think) — you can *create* it. People are living longer these days. Why? Because we're learning that we can improve quality of life through the everyday choices we make. *Happiness For Dummies* tells you how to fight for, create, and live a long

and happy life. It makes you the master of your own happy destiny!

About This Book

How do you know when you're happy? Are you as happy as most people? If you have lots of money or a fancy title at work, shouldn't that be enough to make you happy? What does happiness have to do with health? Is there such a thing as eternal happiness? Can you really make yourself happy by putting a smile on your face? Type B personalities tend to enjoy less material success than Type A's, so why are Type B's so much happier? These are just a few of the important questions that *Happiness For Dummies* answers.

In writing *Happiness For Dummies*, I had five basic goals in mind:

I wanted to show you that happiness is not a simple emotion — it's an extremely complex experience that results from feeling safe, satisfied, and grateful. By understanding all the key ingredients that are involved, you can make up your *own* recipe for happiness.

I wanted to tell you what happiness *isn't* — it isn't power, money, success, or excitement. Happiness is something much more than that!

I wanted to show you how to develop those personality attributes that maximize your potential for happiness — optimism, hardiness, and conscientiousness. These are not qualities that you inherit at birth through some

genetic “good fortune” — they’re learned traits, and if you haven’t learned them yet, this book can help.

I wanted to offer you actionable strategies for pursuing happiness. In other words, I wanted to show you how to get into the flow of everyday life, how to find the silver lining in what you otherwise might view as an all-bad situation, how to develop an abiding sense of self-confidence, and how to smile for the right reasons. Think of this book as your happiness toolbox!

I wanted to emphasize the importance of striking the right balance between the essential opposing forces that constitute human life, like that between work and play or between selfishness and generosity.

Happiness is never found at the extremes of life — it’s in the middle. That’s why they call it the “happy medium”!

Happiness For Dummies is not one of those 12-step books where you have to read and follow the advice of Step 1 before you can proceed to Step 2, and so on. It’s a resource book that contains everything I know about how to achieve happiness after four decades of professional experience, both as a scientist and as a clinician — and after more than 60 years of personal experience living my own life!

I did not want *Happiness For Dummies* to be another one of those pie-in-the-sky books containing more fluff than substance. This book is intended to show ordinary people how to pursue and achieve happiness. Simply put, it’s a road map that guides you to the most sought-after destination in life — happiness. Buying this book means

you want to get there — *Happiness For Dummies* shows you how.

Conventions Used in This Book

Happiness For Dummies is not a book about the science of happiness. Even though the principles contained in the book are based in part on science, I've eliminated all the professional jargon and instead used terms and concepts that the average person without a degree in psychology can understand. Instead of looking at tables and charts, you read about happy people — composites of real people like yourself who represent friends, relatives, and clients I've had the good fortune to learn from over the years. The quotations and two-person dialogs that I include in these stories are based solely on my recollections of conversations I had. And, yes, you find a few reflections on my own most memorable moments of happiness sprinkled throughout —one of the perks of being an author is sharing my experiences!

You don't have to know psychology to understand *Happiness For Dummies*. But I do use a couple of conventions that you should be aware of:

When I introduce a new term, I put the word in *italics* and define it shortly thereafter (usually in parentheses).

When I give you a list of steps to perform, I put the action part of the step in **bold**, so you can easily follow along.

When I list an e-mail address or Web address, I use a special font called monofont so you know exactly what to type.

When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that we haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

Look on the bright side: I won't be giving you a test after you've had a chance to read *Happiness For Dummies*. So, you don't have to read every single word, sentence, chapter, and/or part of the book to get your money's worth. And don't feel compelled to remember everything. If it strikes a nerve, believe me, you'll remember it!

Throughout the book, I include lots of sidebars — text in gray boxes. Sidebars make me happy! Although they aren't an essential part of the overall message conveyed in this book, they are things I thought you might find interesting. You can think of them as side dishes to the main course. If you're hungry for every morsel of information there is on how to pursue happiness, then by all means gobble them up; otherwise, you can skip them altogether and still satisfy your appetite.

You can also safely skip any paragraphs marked with Technical Stuff icons (see "Icons Used in This Book," later in this Introduction, for more information).

Foolish Assumptions

I made a few assumptions about you when I was writing *Happiness For Dummies*:

You want to be happy — but so far happiness has been elusive. You bought this book, not because you want or need someone to convince you that happiness is a good thing, but because you haven't been able to achieve it on your own. You know it's out there; you just don't know how to find it.

You're open-minded about discovering more-efficient ways to achieve happiness. People don't typically buy books simply to reinforce their own fixed ideas about life or to have someone else tell them about experiences they've already had. They're looking for something new, something different, something that will both guide and inspire them — something that will help them not only survive but, more important, thrive on life.

You see yourself as part of the “let's do it” generation and you want to be a player, not a spectator, when it comes to achieving true happiness. This attitude portends one of the key personality traits underlying happiness — hardiness — which I cover in this book. You may be farther along in your pursuit of happiness than you realized!

How This Book Is Organized

I organized *Happiness For Dummies* into 6 parts and 23 chapters. Here's what you can find in each part.

Part I: Defining Happiness

In these first four chapters, I acquaint you with some basic ideas about happiness as a universal emotion, the benefits that positive emotions have for health, the key ingredients that make up happiness, and what happiness isn't. (Knowing what happiness *isn't* is important because many people spend most of their lives searching for happiness in all the wrong places.) I show you how to calculate your HQ — happiness quotient — and help you compare yourself to others so that you know whether you're ahead of or behind the curve. I also explain how happiness is simply your nervous system's feedback about whether you're living the right kind of life — and fill you in on what *right* means in the context of achieving happiness.

Part II: Personality Attributes That Lead to Happiness

In this part, I introduce concepts — in this case, personality attributes — from the emerging field of positive psychology that greatly influence the extent to which you experience happiness. Not everyone learns early in life (if at all) to be optimistic, hardy, and

conscientious, so in these three chapters I show you how to be that type of person and get a leg up in your quest for happiness. It's not hard — trust me.

Part III: Behaving Your Way toward Happiness

Chapters 8 through 12 show you specific ways to behave — always look for the silver lining, have a heart-to-heart with a higher power, make a daily confession of the positives in your life — that increase your potential for achieving happiness. Chapter 12 talks in depth about the power of a smile and gives you a heads-up about which smiles will *not* bring you happiness. The idea here is that happiness is no mere accident — it's something that you have to work for!

Part IV: Striking the Right Balance

If you're like me, your everyday life is mostly out of balance. Sad to say, you approach life from one extreme or another — you work too much and play too little, you have too many hassles and not enough of life's little pleasures, and you're either too selfish or too selfless. Am I right? This part of the book helps you find a happy medium along some of the more important dimensions of life.