



E-mail Sarah at s.stacey@you.co.uk

Sarah reads all your e-mails but regrets that she cannot answer them all personally

Illustrations
NILA RYE

Small GREEN change

Use a planet-friendly toothbrush, such as the Preserve range, which is 100-per-cent recyclable. £2.99, from Victoria Health, see below



Can we learn to be happy?

While there's no lack of research about the ill effects that negative mental states – stress, anxiety, depression, anger and frustration – can wreak on our health, it's only recently that scientists have focused their attention on the benefits of happiness, of feeling good and functioning well. In a ten-year study of 1,300 men, psychologist Laura Kubzansky of the Harvard School of Public Health found that heart-disease rates among men who rated themselves as optimistic were half that of men who didn't – a difference as big as that between smokers and nonsmokers.

Although it's not yet clear how your state of mind affects your biochemistry, there is a theory that if you're stressed your adrenal glands produce more of a hormone called cortisol, which is known to depress your immune system, whereas positive feelings – love and gratitude, for instance – seem to have the opposite effect. Also, happy people tend to look after themselves better.

So, the big question: can anyone be happy? It's clear that some of us are born with a sunnier, easier disposition than others. And, obviously, some people have more difficult lives. But we all know friends who are generally happy and even keep their sweetness, sense of humour and resilience through unremitting difficulties.

Among a growing body of experts who say that we can all learn to live well is Dr Anthony Seldon, headteacher of Wellington College, who believes that the foundations should be laid in schools. Last autumn, the college started a course of 'happiness lessons', focusing on emotional intelligence, forming healthy relationships, setting realistic goals and looking after your body, as well as dealing with pain and unhappiness. The lessons, based on the work of

the Well-being Institute at Cambridge University, have been mocked by some educators, but at the 1st European Conference on Happiness and Its Causes next month, Dr Seldon, flanked by two Wellington students, will report on early indicators of success. 'Results have gone up steeply and incidents of bad behaviour have gone down dramatically. The school doctor reports that the physical and emotional health of pupils is better. It's not conclusive but, intuitively, it makes sense that if you nourish your body and mind, you will perform better,' he explains.

Research shows repeatedly that, above a certain level, having more money doesn't make you happier. Neither is happiness simply about succeeding at school or work: 'As a teacher, I've seen far too many pupils who've achieved five A grades at A-level but are still tortured and unhappy,' says Dr Seldon. 'High achievers don't always blossom as human beings. Their lives flash by and they don't realise they're missing the point. The kids like to understand their emotions and they know how lopsided most education is – about grey matter rather than heart and soul. These lessons help them find a clearer sense of "me".'

Helpfully, the Wellington College website (wellington-college.org.uk) includes its programme for developing wellbeing. The ten practical guidelines apply to all of us. I especially like this tip: 'Don't live accidentally, live deliberately. Take charge of the direction of your life and actively shape it by making positive choices.' *1st European Conference on Happiness and Its Causes, 13-14 October 2007, London, costs £275 plus VAT. YOU readers can book discounted tickets at £225 plus VAT. Book at happinessanditscauses.com*

A BOON FOR BED-WETTERS

A reader whose eight-year-old son has been attempting for years to stop wetting the bed writes to report the success of a self-hypnosis CD. They'd tried the drug desmopressin, which decreases urine production, and an alarm that would sound when he urinated, but nothing helped. Now he's dry, his confidence and happiness have soared. *I'm Dry At Night*, £12.95 inc p&p, tel: 020 8402 1928, firstwayforward.com

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Massage in a bottle

Rituals can make us look as well as feel better. A friend raves about her 'deeply satisfying' Saturday-morning treat of applying Bhringaraj Hair Massage Oil while she relaxes with the newspapers. Based on Ayurvedic principles, it contains organic coconut oil, helps to strengthen hair and may even discourage premature greying. 'I massage the warmed oil into my scalp,' says my friend, 'and it leaves my hair soft and smooth.' Bhringaraj Hair Massage Oil by Pukka, £13.95 from Victoria Health.



All products mentioned, unless otherwise specified, are available by mail order from Victoria Health, tel: 0800 3898 195; victoriahealth.com