1.02

Researchers have found that different people need different things to be happy. But there are some basic things that anyone can do to become happier. Here are four areas of your life you can focus on to improve your long-term happiness.

1. STAY CONNECTED

Psychiatrist Robert Waldinger directs the Harvard Study of Adult Development, one of the longest-running studies of adult behavior. The study tracked the lives of two groups of men in the United States for over 75 years. One of the main findings from the study is the importance of social connections. "It turns out that people who are more socially connected to family, to friends, to community, are happier," says Waldinger. "They're physically healthier, and they live longer than people who are less well-connected." The happiest people meet regularly with friends and family, and support each other in difficult times.

2. KEEP ACTIVE

Nic Marks is the founder of the Happy Planet Index, which tracks national well-being around the world. One of the most important ways to improve well-being, he believes, is to keep active—healthy people are happier people. "The fastest way out of a bad mood," Marks says, is to "step outside, go for a walk, turn the radio on and dance. Being active is great for our positive mood." Being close to nature can also boost happiness. "Our pleasures are really ancient," says psychologist Nancy Etcoff. "We have a response to the natural world that's very profound." Walking a pet in the outdoors, for example, can improve our mood. Pets not only encourage their owners to be healthy, they also provide love and friendship, increasing their owners' self-esteem.

3. BUY LESS

The amount of money you have is a factor for happiness—but your salary may be less important than how you use it. Think carefully before buying expensive clothes or a new car, for example. Try to spend money instead on things that will really enrich your life, such as music lessons, or a vacation with family or friends. "We need to think before we buy," urges designer Graham Hill, and "ask ourselves: 'Is that really going to make me happier?'" Too often we buy things we don't really need. The less stuff we have in our lives, Hill argues, the happier we will be.

4. GIVE AWAY

Social science researcher Michael Norton has studied happiness levels around the world. He found that the act of giving money to people has a powerful effect on the giver as well as the receiver. "Almost everywhere we look," says Norton, "we see that giving money away makes you happier than keeping it for yourself." The amount of money isn't so important. "What really matters is that you spent it on somebody else rather than on yourself," he adds. Another way to give away is to donate your time instead of money. People who volunteer at homeless shelters, for example, find that it helps take the focus off their own problems and makes them feel grateful for what they have. Author David Steindl-Rast believes that being grateful may be the most important foundation for happiness: "It is not happiness that makes us grateful. It's gratefulness that makes us happy."

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A Which sentence best summarizes the reading passage?

a. There are four different types of happy people in the world.
b. There are some small changes everyone can make to increase happiness.
c. Forming social connections is more important for happiness than other factors.

B Read the six scenarios below. Check (✓) the four that follow the advice in the reading passage.

☐ 1. A student installs a budget app on her phone to help control her spending.
☐ 2. A woman offers to take her neighbor's dog for a walk each morning.
☐ 3. A man uses all his savings to pay for an expensive new sports car.
☐ 4. A teenager spends time each Saturday helping at a children's hospital.
☐ 5. A young woman decides to reduce her number of working hours each week.
☐ 6. An elderly man decides to join an art class at a community center.

C Find and underline the **bold** words and phrases below on pages 12–13. Use context to identify their meanings. Then circle the correct answers to complete the definitions.

1. If you have high **self-esteem**, you feel (*confident / unsure*) about yourself.
2. **Salary** is the amount of (*work / money*) that an employee receives.
3. To **enrich** something means to make it (*better / last longer*).
4. If you **take the focus off** something, you give it (*more / less*) attention.

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