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# The secrets of happiness

*Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has devoted his life to studying happiness. He believes he has found the key.*

I've been fascinated by happiness most of my life. When I was a small boy, I noticed that though many of the adults around me were wealthy and educated, they were not always happy and this sometimes led them to behave in ways which I, as a child, thought strange. As a result of this, I decided to understand what happiness was and how best to achieve it. It was not surprising, then, that I decided to study psychology.

On arrival at the University of Chicago 50 years ago, I was disappointed to find that academic psychologists were trying to understand human behaviour by studying rats in a laboratory. I felt that there must be other more useful ways of learning how we think and feel. Although my original aim had been to achieve happiness for myself, I became more ambitious. I decided to build my career on trying to discover what made others happy also. I started out by studying creative people such as musicians, artists and athletes because they were people who devoted their lives to doing what they wanted to do, rather than things that just brought them financial rewards.

Later, I expanded the study by inventing a system called 'the experience sampling method'. Ordinary people were asked to keep an electronic pager for a week which gave out a beeping sound eight times a day. Every time it did so, they wrote down where they were, what they were doing, how they felt and how much they were concentrating. This system has now been used on more than 10,000 people, and the answers are consistent: as with creative people, ordinary people are happiest when concentrating hard.

After carrying out 30 years of research and writing 18 books, I believe I have proved that happiness is quite different from what most people imagine. It is not something that can be bought or collected. People need more than just wealth and comfort in order to lead happy lives. I discovered that people who earn less than £10,000 are not generally as happy as people whose incomes are above that level. This suggests that there is a minimum amount of money we need to earn to make us happy, but above that dividing line, people's happiness has very little to do with how much poorer or richer they are. Multi-millionaires turn out to be only slightly happier than other people who are not so rich. What is more, people living below the dividing line and in poverty are often quite happy too.

I found that the most obvious cause of happiness is intense concentration. This must be the main reason why activities such as music, art, literature, sports and other forms of leisure have survived. In order to concentrate, whether you're reading a poem or building a sandcastle, what you need is a challenge that matches your ability. The way to remain continually happy, therefore, is to keep finding new opportunities to improve your skills. This may mean learning to do your job better or faster, or doing other more difficult jobs. As you grow older, you have to find new challenges which are more appropriate to your age. I have spent my life studying happiness and now, as I look back, I wonder if I have achieved it. Overall, I think I have, and my belief that I have found the keys to its secret has increased my happiness immeasurably.

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For questions 1 and 2, the sentences in the article which give you the answers have been underlined. Read the questions and the underlined sentences. Then choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the underlined sentences.

1 What does *this* in line 6 refer to?
- A the writer's decision to study psychology
- B the writer's interest in happiness
- C the writer's observations of adults
- D the writer's unhappy childhood

2 What sort of people did the writer choose to concentrate on at the start of his career?
- A People who were clearly happier
- B People with more freedom
- C People whose main aim in life was not making money
- D People whose objective was to become richer

3 Now, for questions 3–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

3 The 'experience sampling method' showed in general that
- A creative people are happier than other people.
- B uncreative people are just as happy as creative people.
- C people's happiness depends on who they are with.
- D people are happier when they are very focused on an activity.

4 *that dividing line* in line 47 refers to a division between
- A living more comfortably and less comfortably.
- B poor countries and rich countries.
- C happy people and unhappy people.
- D millionaires and poor people.

5 According to the writer, people concentrate more when they are doing
- A something which they find enjoyable.
- B something which they find difficult but possible.
- C something which they find quite easy.
- D many things at the same time.

6 What impression do you have of the writer of the text?
- A He has become happier by studying happiness.
- B He has been unhappy most of his life.
- C He has always been a happy person.
- D He has only been happy for short times.

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