



## May is Women's Health Month Happiness and Women's Health

The study of happiness is still relatively new, yet numerous studies in the past decade have laid the foundation of how happiness increases overall life satisfaction for the public's health at the individual and societal level. Happiness is about the way you live, your view of the world and how much personal freedom you have in your environment, whether it's at home or work. As more women balance work and family life, the level of happiness for women has decreased compared to men.<sup>1</sup>

### Benefits of Happiness

Happiness in the context of the public's health, especially in women's health, is beneficial at the physiological, individual and community level. At the physiological level, happiness has psychosocial responses that can predict health outcomes. With increased happiness levels, positive health behaviors increase.<sup>2</sup> People are more likely to engage in physical activity, wear sunscreen, and go for regular checkups. It has been shown that happiness greatly decreases cortisol levels. Limited cortisol exposure is associated with reduced risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.<sup>2</sup>

At the individual level, happy people generally have more friends, are sociable, have a high level of self esteem, attract more happy people, generally live longer and possess the happiness traits: love, zest, gratitude and curiosity, all of which increase life satisfaction. Typically income level is thought to influence an individual's happiness, however, once basic needs are met, the effects of income on happiness get smaller and smaller.<sup>3,4</sup> Emory University researchers and others found that a year after winning the lottery, winners were no happier than controls.<sup>5</sup>

At the community level, happiness promotes social strengths such as love, zest and social support which in turn increase life satisfaction. Societies with increased life satisfaction are happier, healthier and live longer. Research in the field continues to propose mechanisms to better understand happiness and its role as a treatment module for chronic conditions such heart disease and autoimmune disorders and depression, conditions highly prevalent in women.

### Well-Being and Happiness in Public Health

Well-being is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices towards being the best they can be. It is a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential. It is multi-dimensional and holistic, encompassing the environment, mental and spiritual well-being and is positive and affirming.<sup>6</sup> Although prevention is the primary focus of Public Health, it is just as important to assess and understand what contributes to well-being and happiness.

Women's Health Month is a good time to focus on your health:

***Be Active, Eat Smart, Don't Smoke, Get Checked!***

### References

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