

# The Science of Happiness

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# Disclosure Information

- Gillian Mandich, PhD
  - No Disclosures



# Today's Conversation

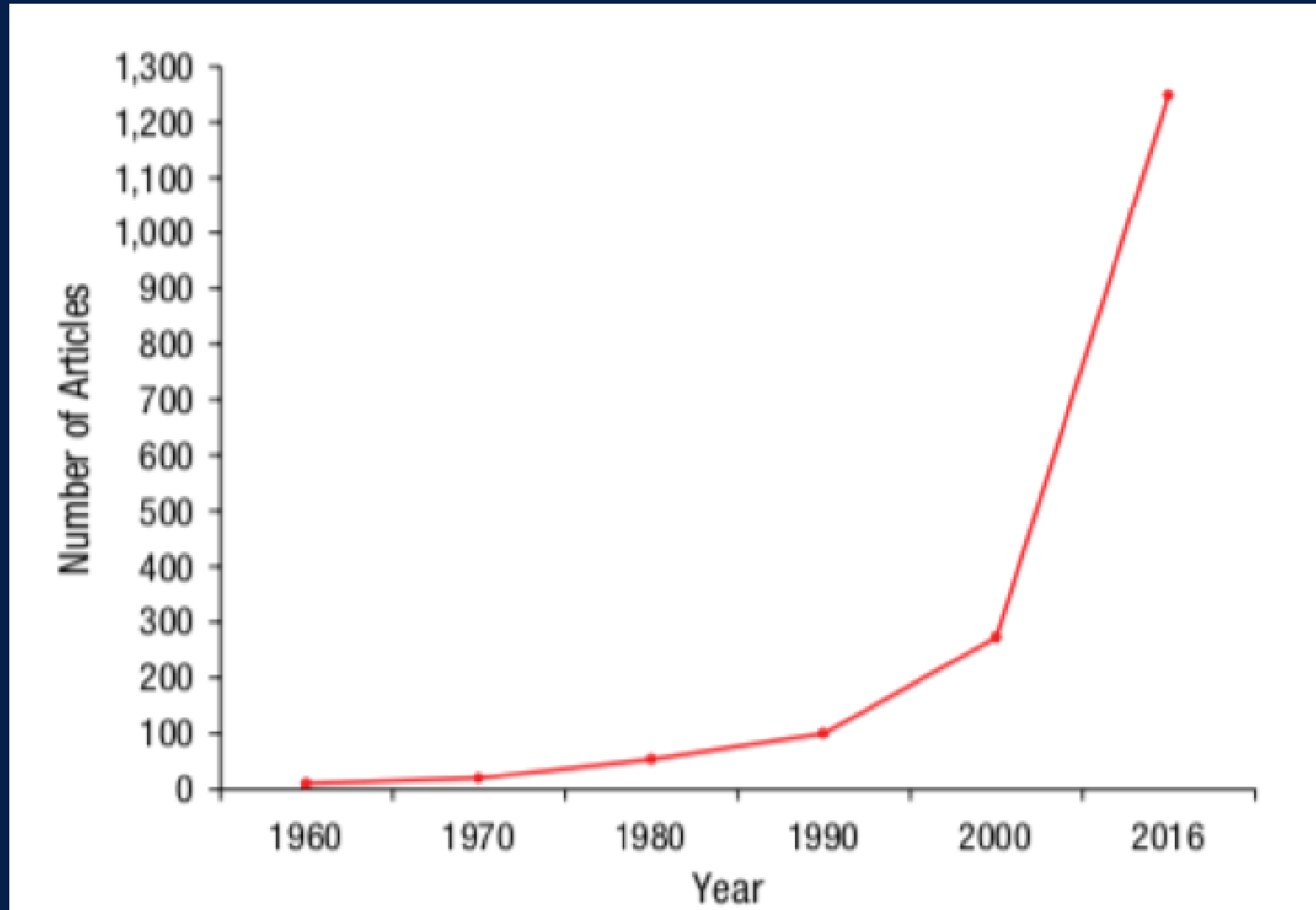
- The Science of Happiness
- Rethinking Happiness
- Tools and Strategies
  - Hedonic Adaptation



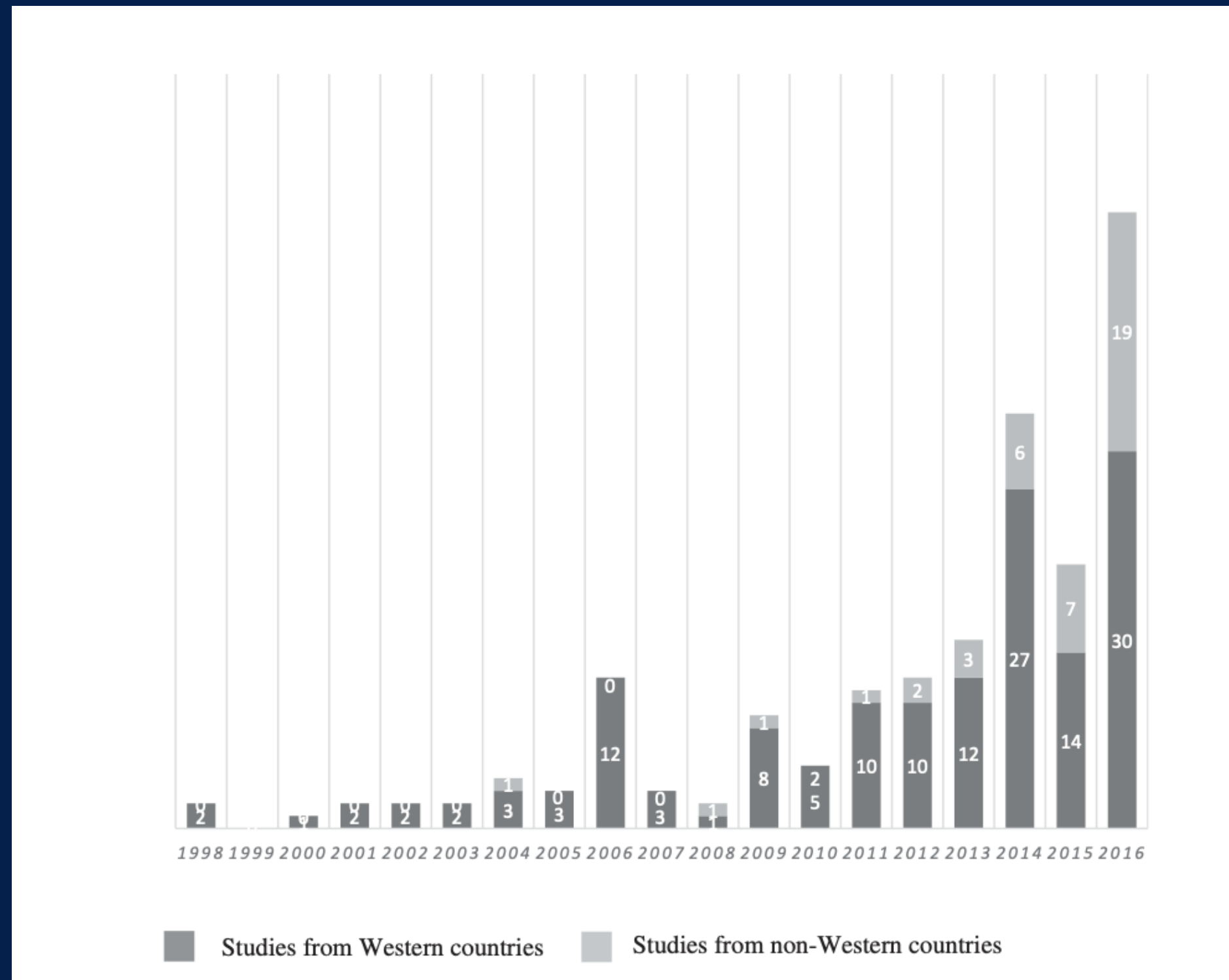
**There is no  
secret to  
happiness, but  
there is a  
science to it.**



# Number of Scientific Publications on Happiness by 5-Year Periods



# Randomized Controlled Trials on Positive Psychology Interventions Through Time



# The Science of Happiness





# Happy people are healthier

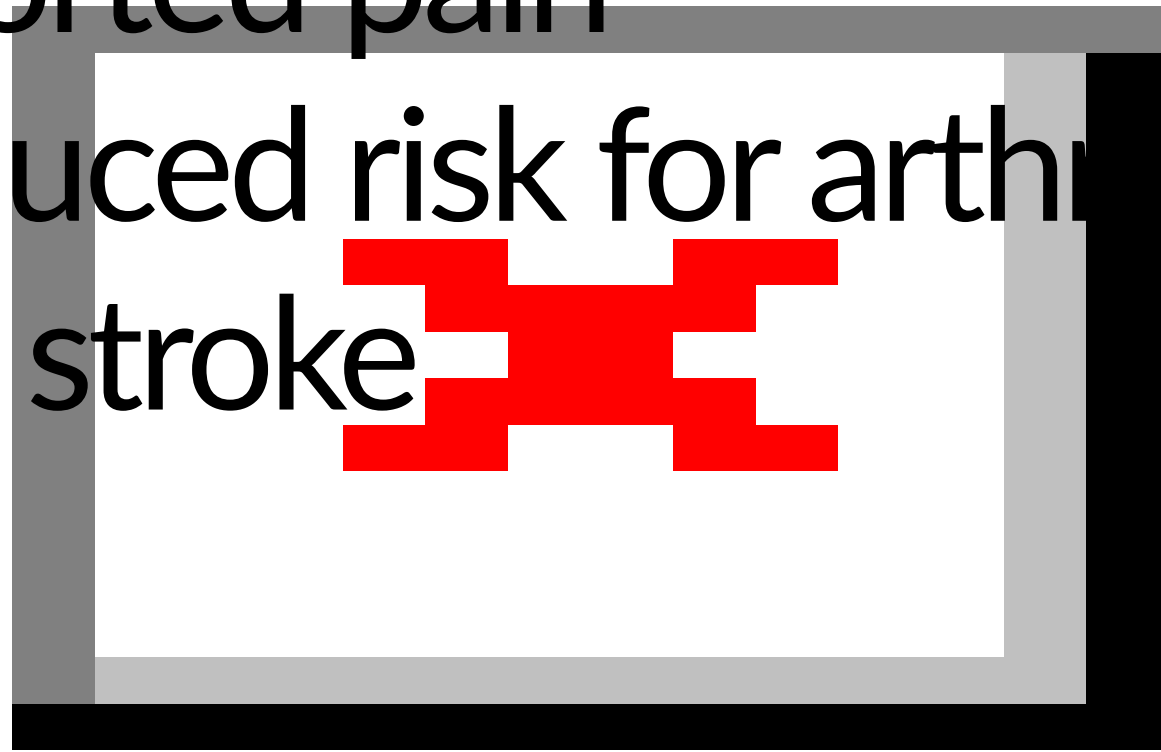
- Better self-reported health
- Less illness and disease (mental and physical)
- Slower disease progression
- Increased lifespan (in both healthy and ill samples)
- Increased healthspan

# Happy people are healthier

- Engage in healthier behaviours
  - More physically active
  - Slower declines in fruit and vegetable consumption over time
  - Better sleep (duration and quality)
  - More frequent seatbelt use
  - Avoid risky behaviours (e.g. not using sun protection)

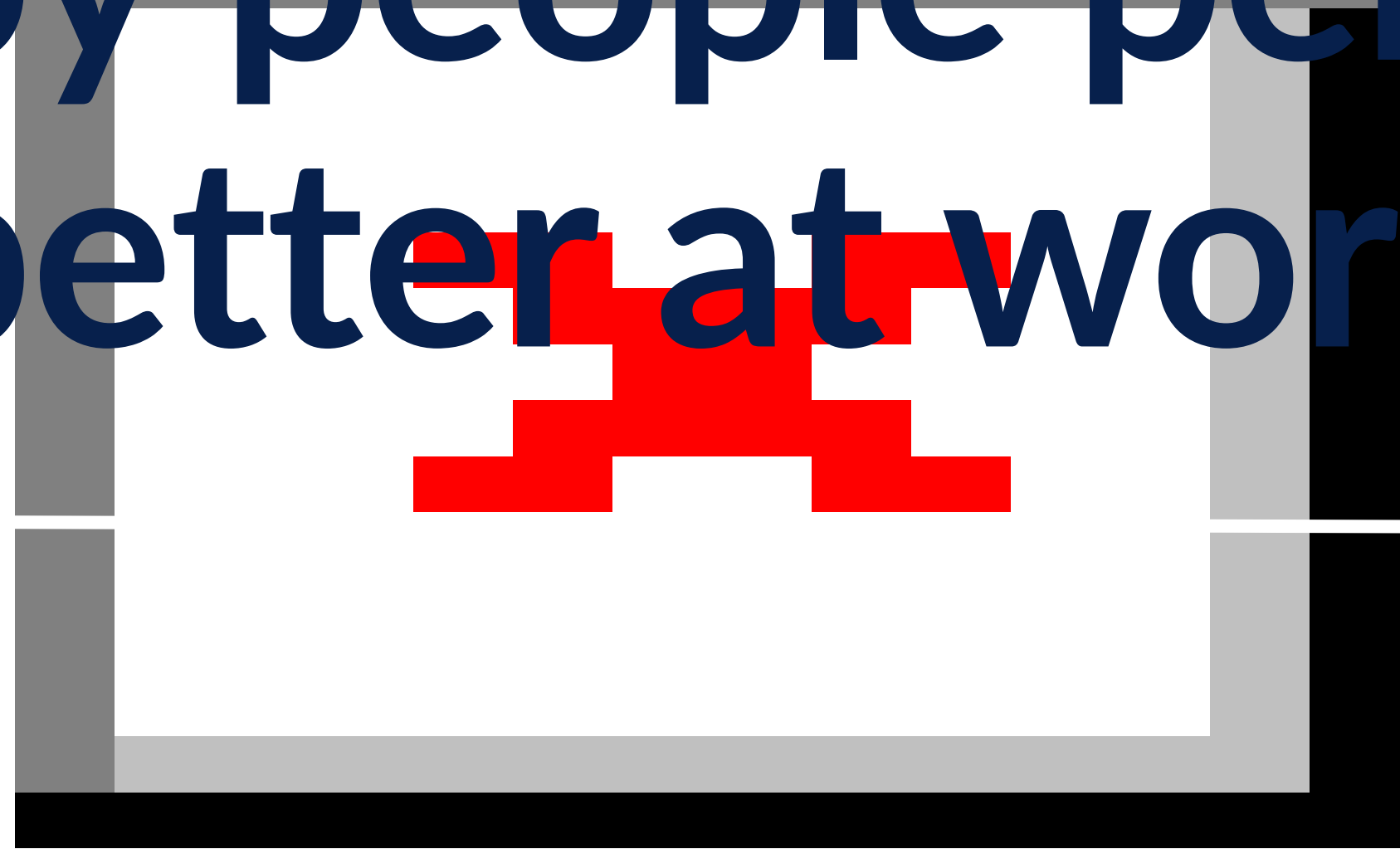
# Happy people are healthier

- Less self-reported illness symptoms and self-reported pain
- Reduced risk for arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, and stroke





Happy people perform  
better at work



“People who experience greater positive affect enjoy better outcomes in the workplace than their less happy peers.”

**Happiness is correlated with job performance ratings, even after controlling for:**

- **employee age**
- **tenure with the organization**
- **education level.**







# Happy people have more fulfilled lives

- More likely to marry and less likely to divorce
- Happier marriages
- More friends and social support
- Stronger interpersonal relationship satisfaction
- Less conflict

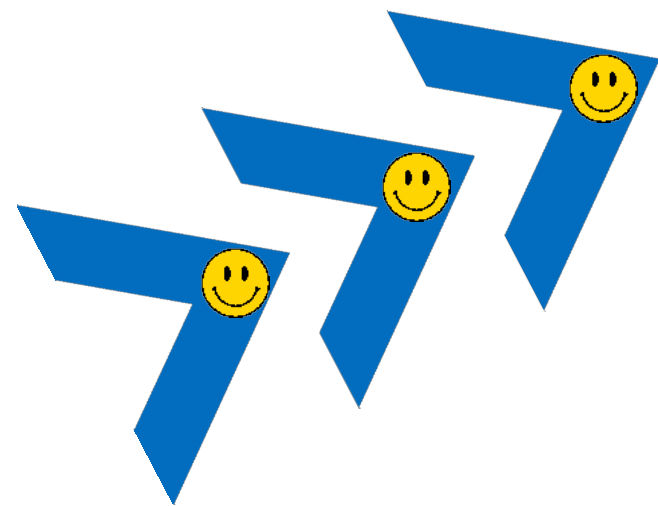
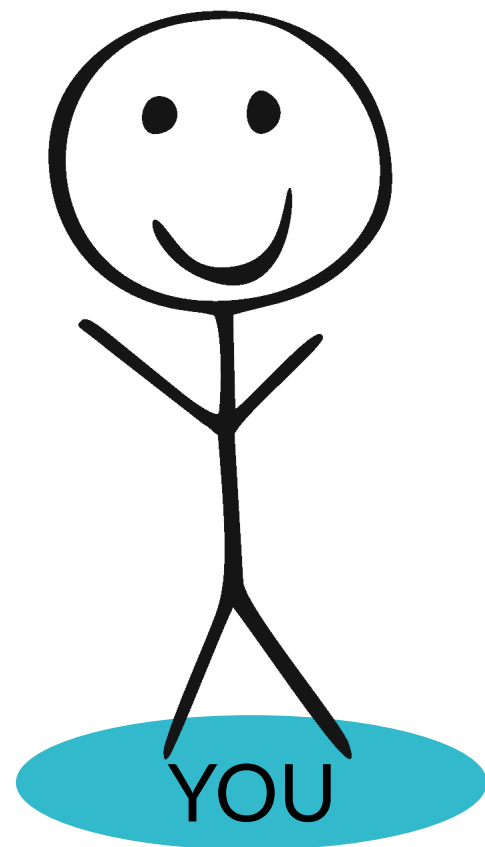


# Happy people have more fulfilled lives

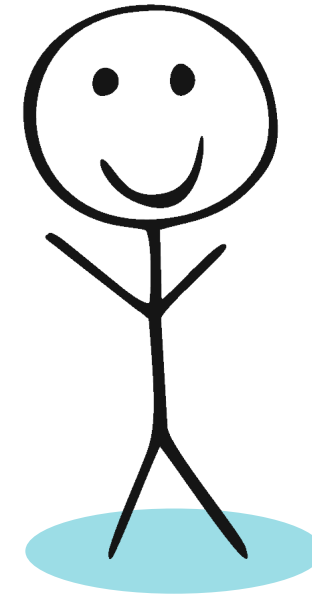
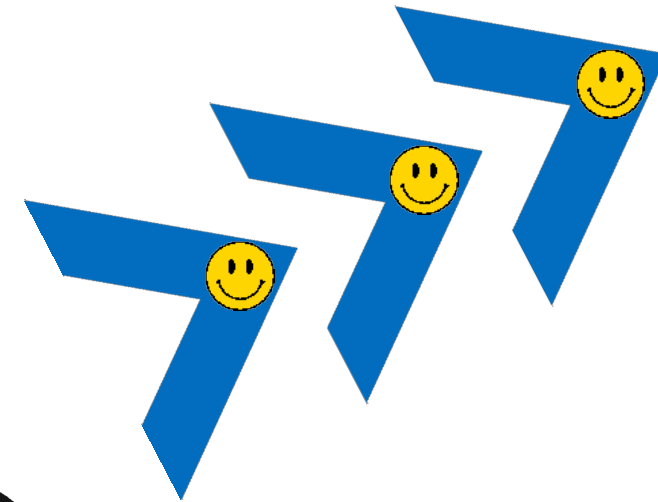
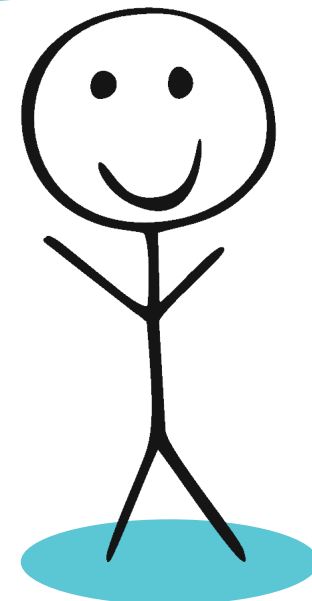
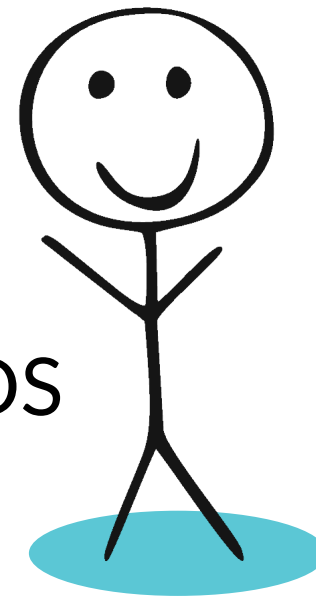
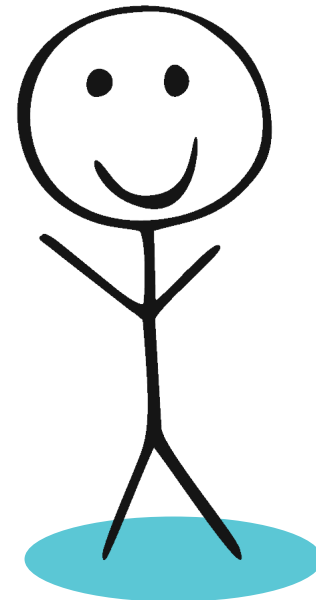
- Greater prosocial behaviour
- More generous, helpful, and philanthropic
- More intrinsic motivation
- Enhanced creativity
- More resilience to stress and trauma



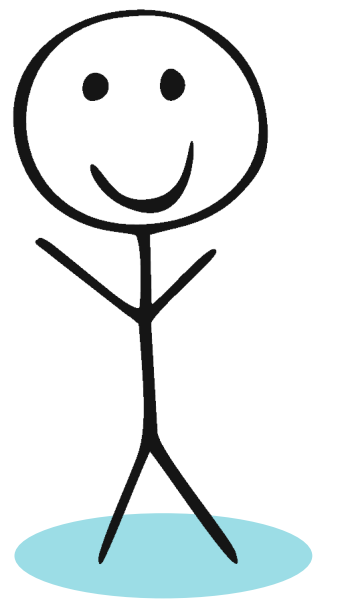
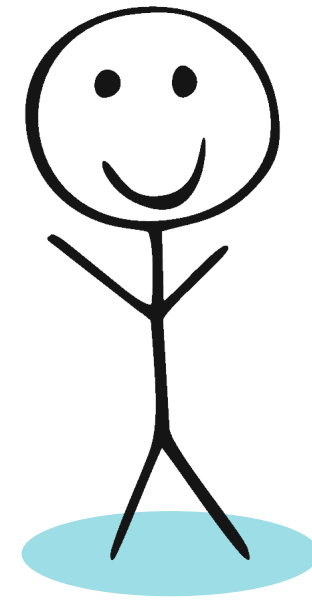
"the relationship between people's happiness extends up to three degrees of separation"



FRIENDS




FRIENDS' OF FRIENDS





CAN WE  
INCREASE  
OUR  
HAPPINESS?

A cartoon illustration of Eeyore, a grey donkey with a black mane, sitting on the ground in a field. He has a sad expression with drooping ears and closed eyes. In the background, there are several large hay bales and a hazy landscape under a blue sky.

“I’m just not a  
very happy  
person.”

none of these changes come without real effort







**Research  
shows that  
happiness  
skills can be  
learned.**



# The empirical evidence available to date suggests happiness can be increased via:

- Interventions
- Intentional activities



(Sin and Lyubomirsky, 2009)

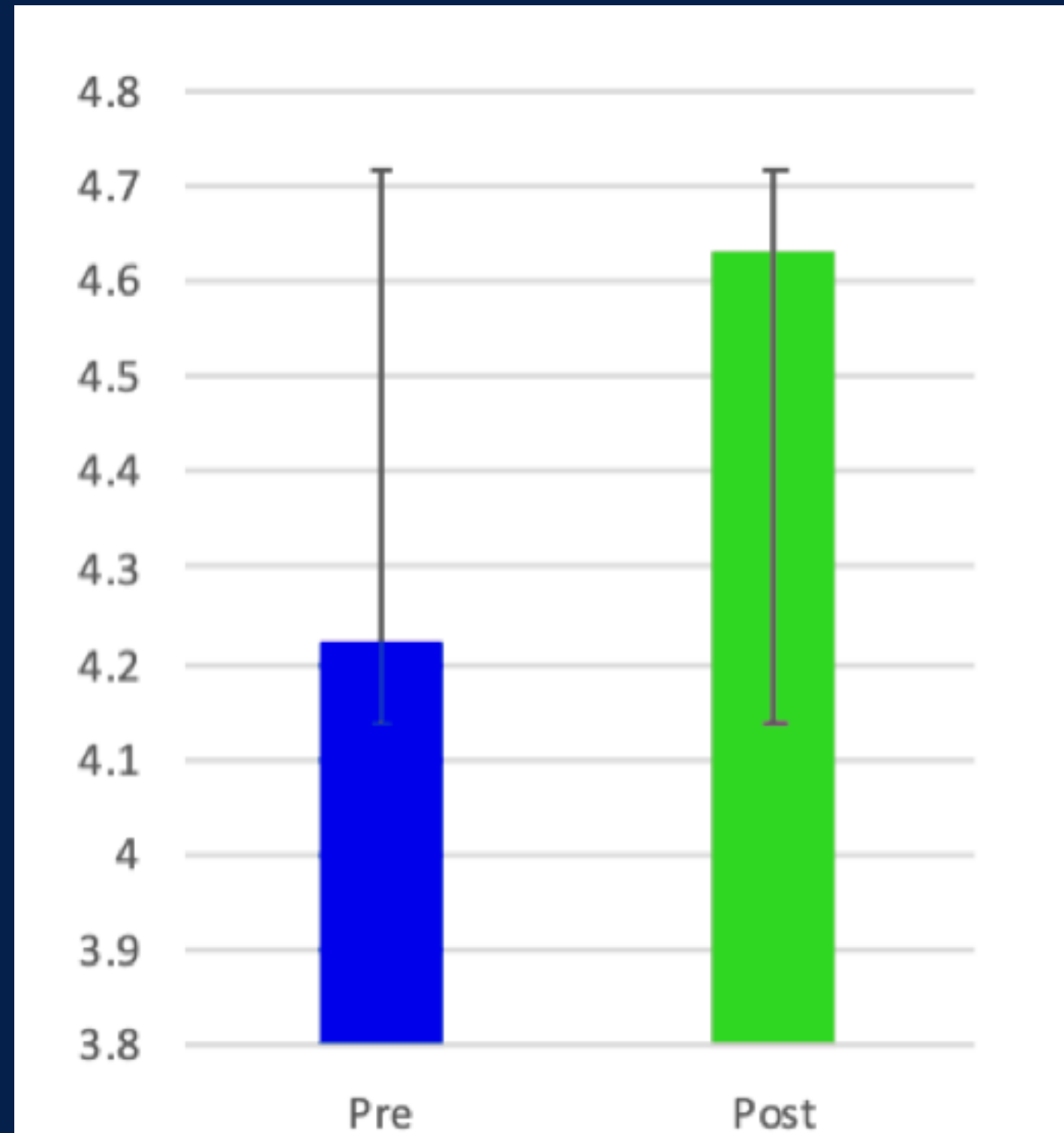
(Bolier et al., 2013)



(White, Uttil, & Holder, 2019)



# Authentic Happiness Inventory Mean Scores



Western  
HealthSciences



# Rethinking Happiness

I will be  
happy when \_\_\_\_\_




**Work hard, become  
successful, and then  
you will be happy.**





NOT





**Happiness is  
not an end  
point or a  
destination.**

**A happy life means  
practicing happiness  
regularly.**





Happiness



Time

**When you are  
having a bad or off  
day, how do you stay  
positive?**

**When you are  
having a bad or off  
day, how do you stay  
positive?**

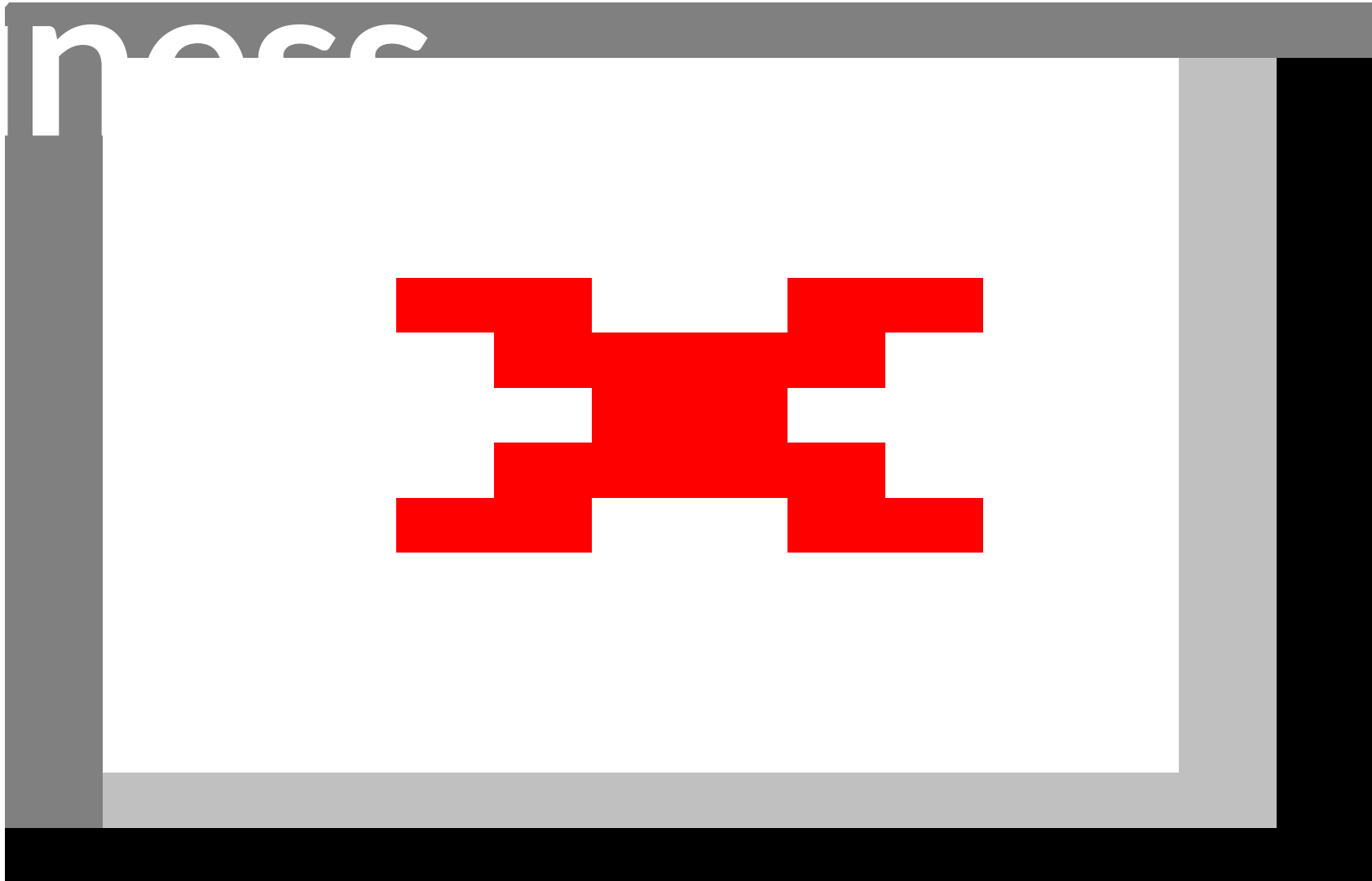
**YOU DON'T.**





**Happy all the time = not the goal**





# 2 Questions



# How happy are you right now?

1

10



# If you won \$10,000 today, would you be happiest if:

## A



You spent it on home renovation or new wardrobe

## B



You spent it on a trip (when you feel comfortable to travel)

## C



You budgeted yourself ~\$200/week for a year for self-care (movies, concerts, massages, dinner)

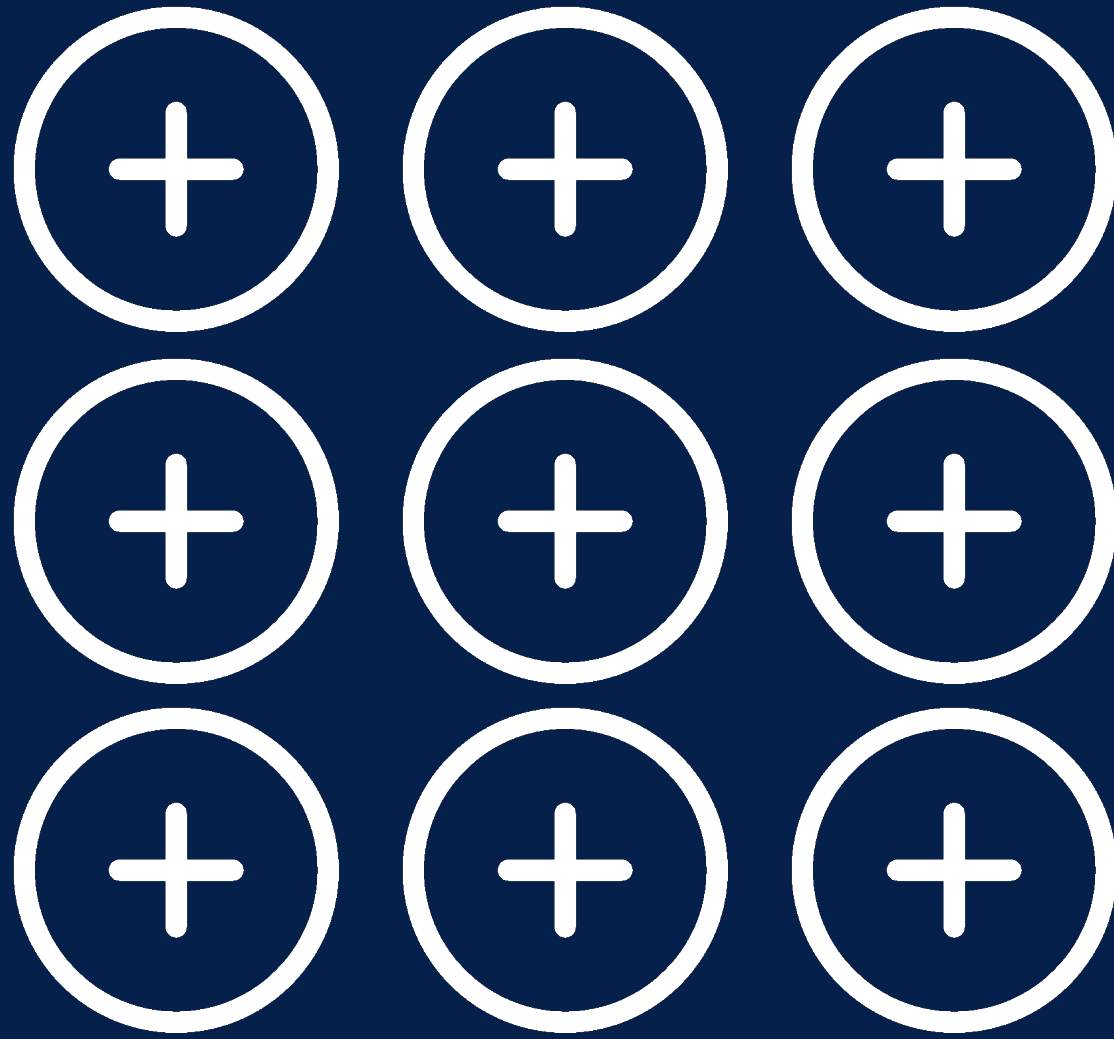
## D



You donated all your winnings to your favourite charity

**We are pretty good at assessing  
HOW happy we are**

**...but we are not as good at is  
determining WHAT makes us happy.**



**“Small” bursts of happy  
moments add up**



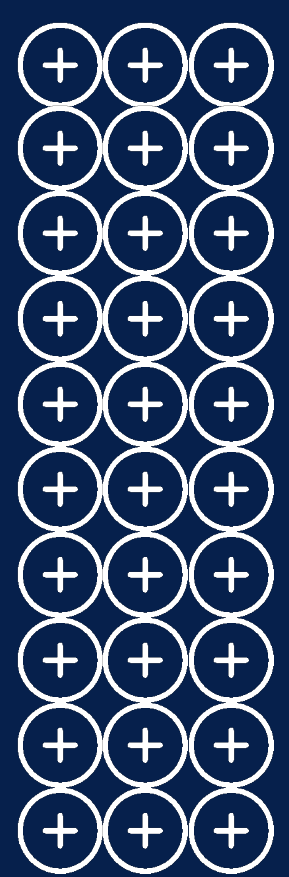
1 day



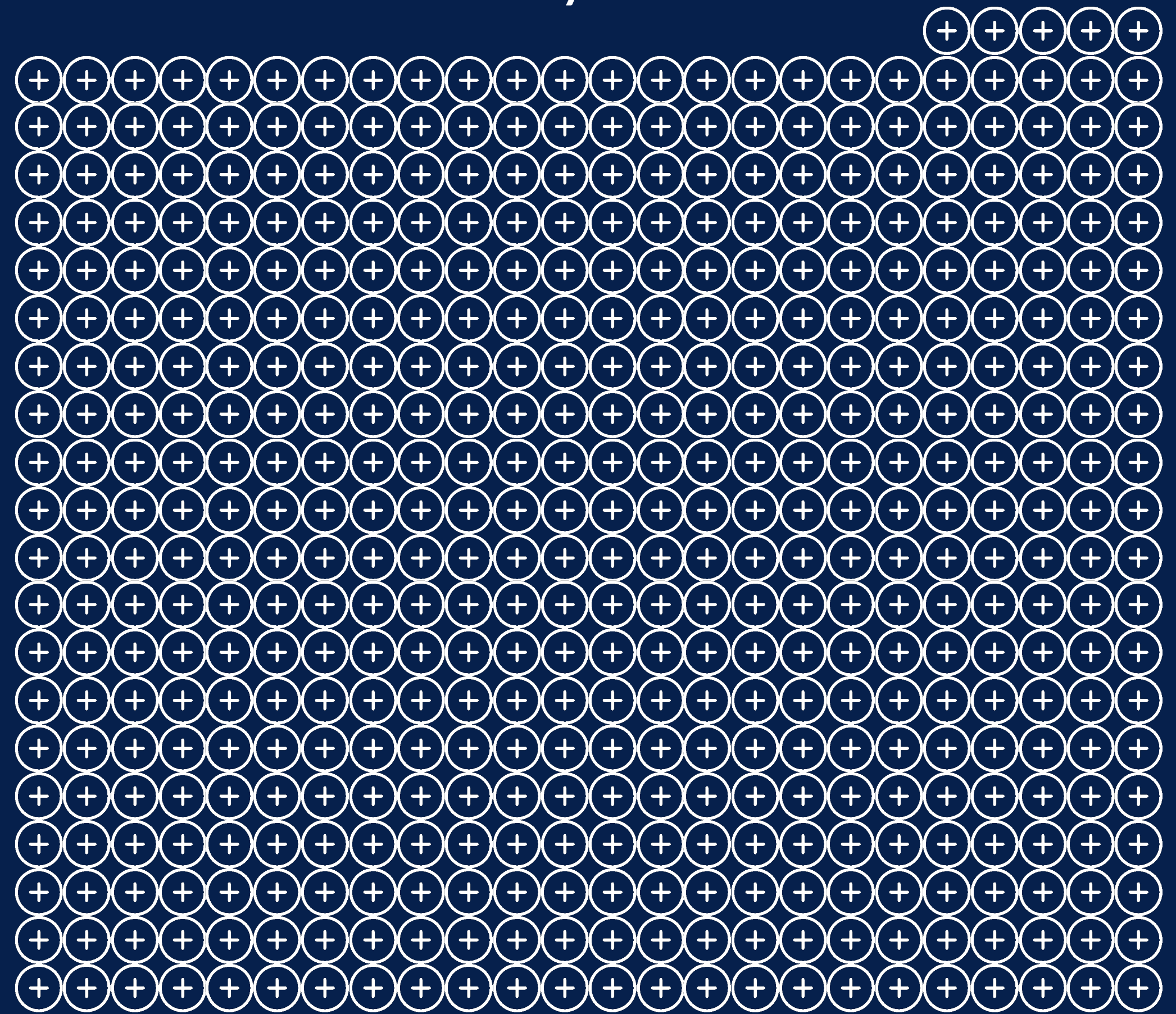
1 week



1 month



1 year





**Transient bursts of happiness create  
upward spirals of positive emotion.**



Happiness



Time

# Tools & Strategies

**Y-O-U**



# Healthcare workers experience high rates of:

- burnout
- stress
- depression due to workplace conditions  
(including excessive workloads, workplace violence and bullying)
- negative effects on patients

The costs to  
the physician  
and to the  
health care  
system can  
be enormous

# Increased rates of:

- depression
- alcohol and drug abuse
- difficult relationships with coworkers
- divorce
- suicide
- medical errors
- patient dissatisfaction
- physician attrition.

There is a growing call for the 'triple aim' of healthcare delivery (improving patient experience, outcomes, and reducing costs) to include a **fourth aim: improving the health of staff.**





Physician wellness  
might not only benefit  
the individual  
physician, it could also  
be vital to the delivery  
of high-quality health  
care.



# 1. The Foundational Three:

- **Nutrition**
- **Physical Activity**
- **Sleep**



Exercise may very well be  
the most effective **instant**  
**happiness booster** of all  
activities.



"As little as 10  
minutes  
physical activity  
may greatly  
increase the  
odds of being  
happy."



Gratitude

Mindfulness

Nature

Stress  
Management

Autonomy

Awe

Forgiveness

Social  
Connection

Savour

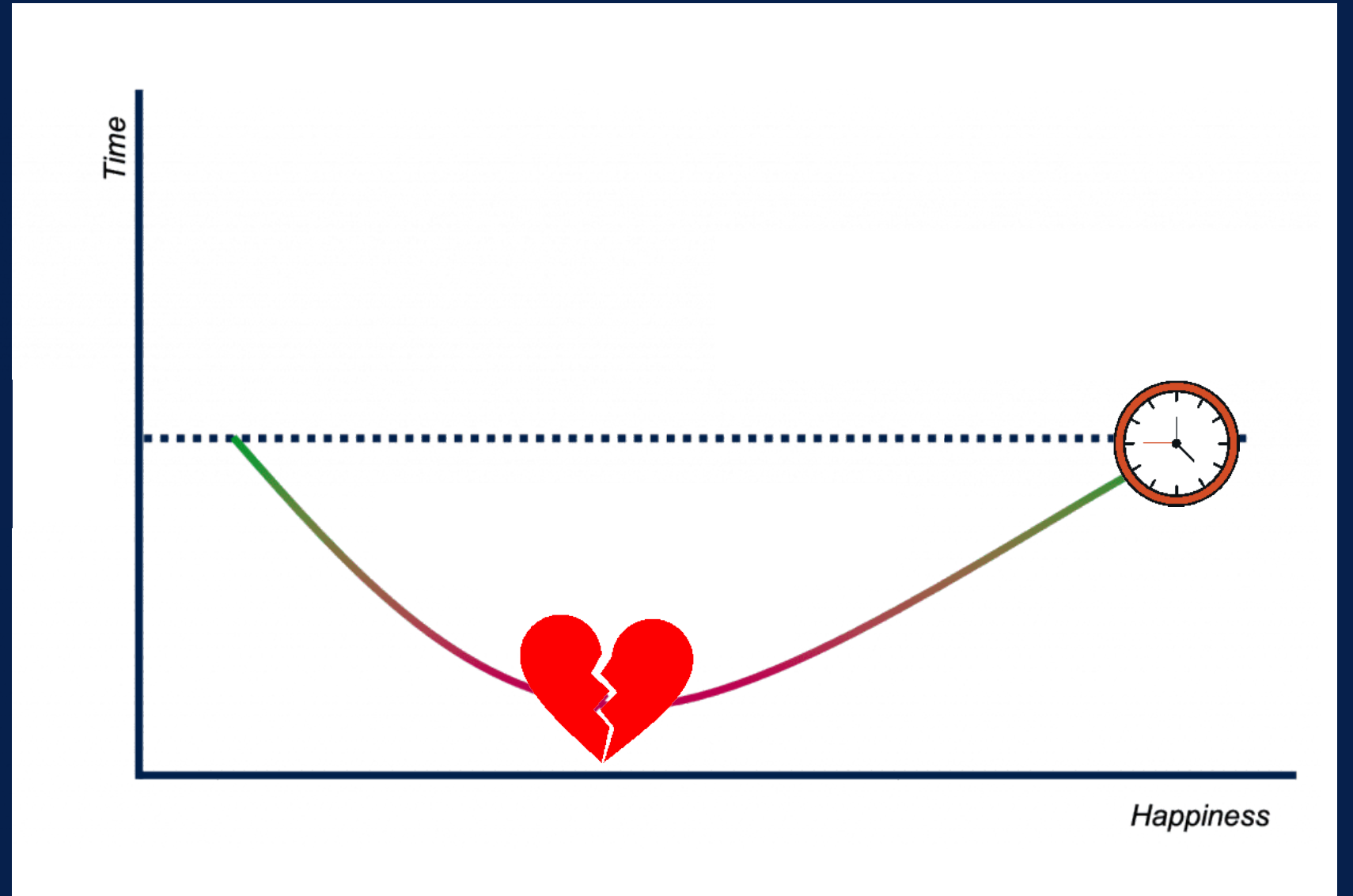
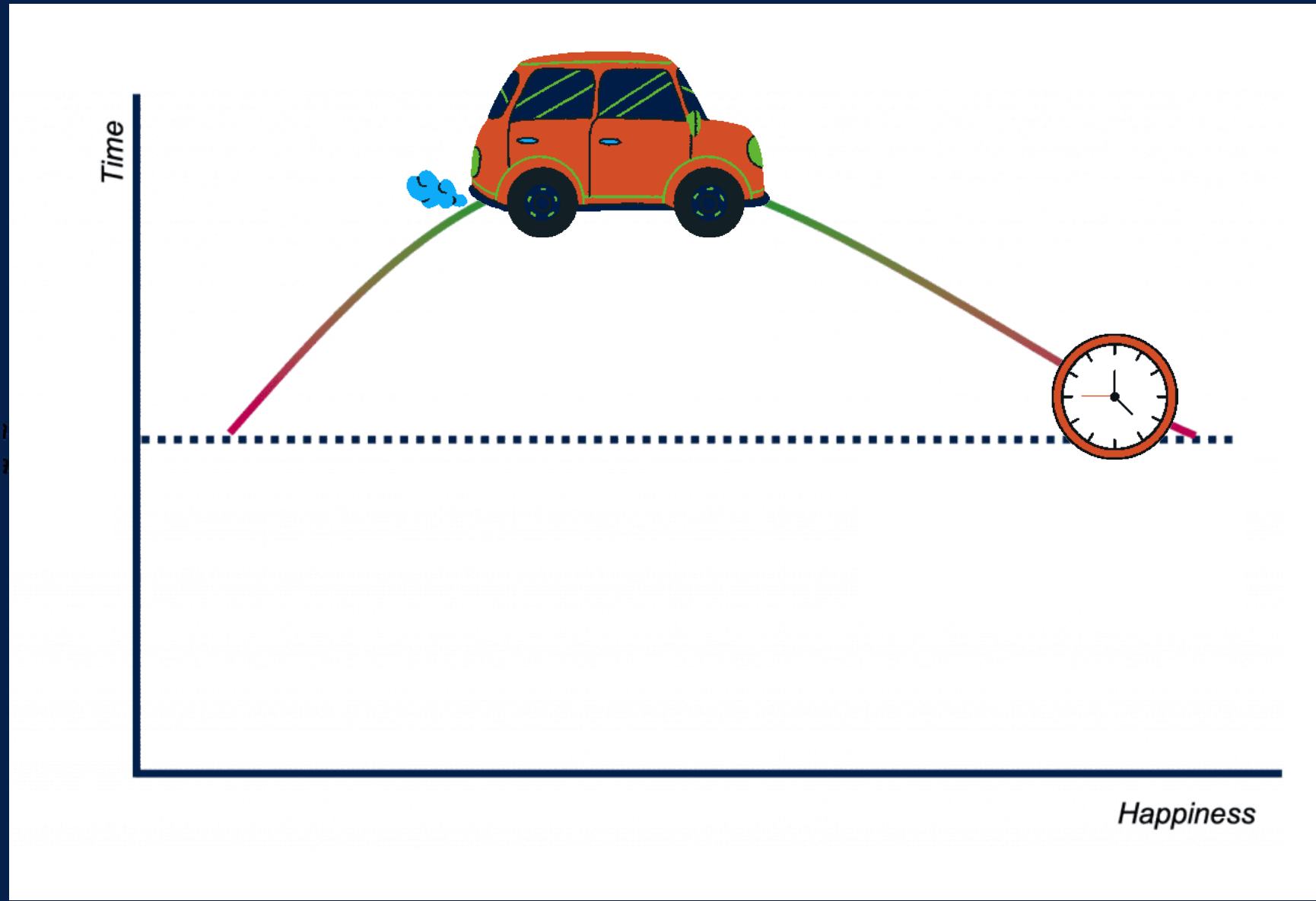
Volunteer

Delete



# HEDONIC

**"The process by which people get used to events or stimuli that elicit emotional responses."**



**KEEP**  
"I can't ~~get~~ no  
satisfaction"





**"Individuals who wish to mitigate the speed and extent of adaptation can do so by incorporating intentional, effortful, positive activities into their daily lives."**

# 1. VARIETY



# VARIETY

- Engaging in not only a greater number of activities, but in a greater variety of activities is predictive of larger mood improvements.
- People adapt most easily to constant stimuli (vs changing, unpredictable stimuli).
- Variety in what people do as they strive to become happier is efficacious and moderates hedonic adaptation.

(Armenta, Bao, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2014; Berlyne, 1970; Lyubomirsky, 2011; Okabe-Miyamoto, Margolis, & Lyubomirsky, 2021; Pronin & Jacobs, 2008; Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2012; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008)



**Variety increases the complexity of a situation, thereby making it more interesting and allowing individuals to maintain their curiosity and awareness.**



**Increased variety = larger +  
longer happiness boost**





# Mix it up!

- Type of activity

**Rotate your pleasures so  
they feel new or fresh.**





# Mix it up!

- Type of activity
- Ways of completing the same activity



## Restricted Access Condition

(give up chocolate for a week)



## Abundant Access Condition

(abundant supply of chocolate for a week)



## Control Condition

(maintain usual chocolate consumption)

- **Restricted Access Condition:** savored chocolate significantly more and derived more positive affect from eating it
- **Abundant access condition:** a significant drop in positive affect after eating chocolate in the lab from 1 week to the next

Surprise is similar to variety, but it is distinguished by its unpredictability. Where variety can be planned and prepared for, surprise is unforeseen and inconsistent.





# Surprise keeps things exciting and fresh



- those who could not be certain of why they received the money experienced a greater increase in positive mood
- those who received surprising personal feedback continued to increase in well-being even after the study was over

Individuals cannot purposefully plan more surprises into their lives (as this would remove the crucial characteristic of unpredictability) but they can plan to engage in adventures and experiences that may naturally hold surprises.



3.





"Appreciation is  
the psychological  
opposite of  
adaptation."

(p. 672)



- **Effortfully directing attention toward appreciation of a positive life change can increase and prolong hedonic experiences.**
- **People who experience higher levels of appreciation toward a positive life change adapt more slowly.**

Inducing gratitude and appreciation

for things, events, or people can:

- counteract materialism
- boost happiness and well-being
- increase life satisfaction
- reduce stress

**Continued appreciation of a positive change can inhibit rising aspirations and thus thwart adaptation.**

**Gratitude-based activities slow adaptation by extending the boost in well-being that events, circumstances, or experiences provide.**

# Gratitude-based activities:

- Counting one's blessings
- 3 good things
- Gratitude journal
- Gratitude jar
- Gratitude walk
- Thank you letter/card
- "What went well" exercise



# Summary

## 1. Happy Foundation

- Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Sleep
- Connection

## 2. Variety

## 3. Surprise

## 4. Appreciation

# Final Takeaway

**“If more information  
was the answer,  
we’d all be  
billionaires with  
perfect abs.”**

~Derek Sivers





# Thank you!

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