Happiness, ventured William James, the noted 19th century philosopher/psychologist, is reflected in the ratio of one's accomplishments to one's aspirations. This suggests, of course, that when it comes to feeling happy in our lives, we can choose one of two paths: continually add to our list of accomplishments—or lower our expectations.

Since then, researchers have suggested new definitions of happiness and how we should go about getting there. In their attempt to understand and quantify the state of "subjective well-being" (lab-speak for happiness), a new ratio/question has emerged: How many positive vs. negative experiences must people have before they can call themselves genuinely "happy"?

The general consensus of current research is that happiness is greatest when we combine frequent numbers of good experiences with a few very intense ones. The good experiences may include, for example, having a good, productive job, a caring spouse or romantic partner, and several hobbies or interests that one takes pleasure in. An occasional romantic getaway weekend, the birth of a new child, or garnering recognition for some personal or professional deed would satisfy the need for intense pleasures.

Yet, to feel happy, our focus nevertheless needs to be on the frequency, not the intensity, of positive events in our lives. Learning how to take pleasure in the littler victories, recognizing their importance in our lives, and working hard to minimize the negatives will accomplish more than waiting around for a burst of intense pleasure. When we place an overriding emphasis on the "big moments," we run the risk of disillusionment and disappointment—we miss out on the very things that do
we must continually examine our most basic assumptions. In this issue, we explore the elusive art of being happy. On the next six pages, four researchers reveal who has it, and how to get there. On the following pages, we explore new developments in the pursuit of happiness.

the scut work of happiness.

While there appears to be no one route to happiness, information gathered by researchers from interviews with thousands of subjects of varying ages, economic backgrounds, education level, age, sex, and cultural origin suggests that there are steps we can take to improve our overall satisfaction and well-being. To describe them for you, we sought out four top happiness researchers from across the United States and Canada.

We asked all of them the same five questions:

- How do you define happiness?
- What are the best ways to get there?
- Who is happy...happier...happiest?
- What doesn't lead to happiness (that we mistakenly think will)?
- Has the definition of happiness changed significantly over the last few decades?
Drawing on self-report scales, longitudinal studies, and clinical interviews with thousands of subjects, the following experts offer some practical advice on the subtle art of feeling good.

John Reich, Ph.D.
Arizona State University

**Mastery Counts**

Based on clinical interviews and self-report measures I’ve initiated and studied, I believe that happiness is being aware not only of the positive events that occur in your life but also that you yourself are the cause of these events—that you can create them, that you control their occurrence, and that you play a major role in the good things that happen to you. Of course, though to a lesser degree, happiness is also the awareness that you can prevent negative events from happening. This sense of mastery over both the good and bad events in your life contributes to an overall sense of well-being.

As far as the best ways to get there, I would say that attempting to cause as many positive events as you feel capable of—and being successful at most of them—is the quickest and most effective way to achieve happiness. Naturally, this requires a certain amount of skill. First of all, and this may not be as easy as it sounds, you need to know what it is that really makes you happy. It probably isn’t earning a lot of money, though that may be true.

And it can be something as simple as finding a good book to sailing around the world. Whatever these “happy triggers” are, chances are they’ll be a spectrum of causes from the small to the huge.

Second, once you’ve identified what it is that makes you happy, you need to know how to create such events. We may all enjoy spending time with our loved ones, but coming up with romantic ideas has always been a problem for many couples. Third, there’s the motivation required to put them into action, to actually go ahead and make the attempt—search the bookstores for a good novel, call the bed & breakfast for reservations, and so on. And, of course, the same criteria apply when we attempt to avoid negativity in our lives.

The happiest people are not only able but also motivated to make good things happen in their lives—and are somewhat successful in their endeavors. Less motivated people are less happy, simply put.

Trying to ignore negative events, or simply forgetting about them after they’ve occurred, will not remove their unhappy effect on your life. To the extent that they are present, or their memories are, you’ll feel unhappy, or significantly less happy than you could be feeling.

Finally, a common error many people tend to make when they think about that would make them happier is to believe that simply having positive events happen in their lives—without utilizing their skill or motivation in bringing them about—will lead to happiness. Not true. Winning the lottery may make you happy for a short while, but a random event, occurring without our input, will not create long-term happiness. We need the sense of mastery of control; the feeling that something good has happened because we caused it to happen.

I don’t know whether the definition of happiness has changed in the last 50 or so, but there has been a change in what psychologists know about it. Research has revealed this heretofore unknown aspect of happiness: the need for self-involvement and control over the events that occur in our lives, both good and bad. Such mastery, and our awareness of it, is the key to genuine happiness.

Ed Diener, Ph.D.
University of Illinois

**Frequency, Not Intensity**

I should be noted from the outset that the majority of people say they are happy. When we explore what leads people to evaluate their emotional lives in a positive way, we find that the ratio of pleasant to unpleasant emotions is a central factor. It appears that the life with an occasional intense positive experience, but with a moderate level of pleasant emotional experience most of the time, is likely to lead an individual to evaluate his or her life in a positive way.

Put simply, frequent positive experiences are both necessary and sufficient to produce the state we call happiness, whereas random intense experiences are not. Thus, what we call happiness seems actually to be comprised of the frequent positives versus the infrequent negatives in our lives.

In terms of who’s happy and who isn’t, age and education show only small correlations with reports of well-being (happiness). Marriage has been a consistent positive predictor of emotional well-being, with married people reporting greater well-being than singles. And while both men and women consistently report much higher levels of depression—twice the levels of men. In Western cultures, women generally have more intense emotions—both pleasant and unpleasant—than do men.
David G. Meyers, Ph.D.

Develop Interdependence

I view happiness as deeper than a momentary good mood—as an enduring sense of positive well-being, an ongoing perception that life is fulfilling, meaningful, and pleasant. But in reporting on the markings of happy lives I define happiness as whatever people mean when they describe their lives as happy rather than unhappy.

As it happens, those who say they are very happy usually seem so to others, as well. They smile and laugh readily during interviews. Friends and family members typically agree with their self-description.

One could write a whole book on new research-based guides to happier living (and I have). These include:

- Act happy. Talk and act as if you have the traits and attitudes of a happy person, and you may gain them. Going through the motions can trigger the emotions.

We’re all in it together. Defining ourselves as interdependent as well as independent provides an antidote to misery.

Extraversion, or outgoingness, has also been strongly associated with happiness, along with self-esteem and individualism. Studies have shown extraverts to be happier, even when left alone, and are in fact happier than introverts whether they live alone or with others, or work in social or non-social jobs.

In addition, behavioral genetic work shows that there is a sizable heritability to levels of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Stable temperaments and dispositions may be more powerful than environmental factors in influencing happiness levels. Some researchers have found a larger heritability for unpleasant than for pleasant emotions, which suggests that environmental and situational factors may have a greater influence on happiness, whereas inborn temperament may play a greater role in unhappiness.

As far as other factors are concerned, physical attractiveness is one of the most highly prized resources in Western cultures. Yet it correlates only weakly with subjective well-being. And intelligence shows virtually no correlation with happiness levels.

It has also been hypothesized that a person’s level of happiness is determined by comparisons he or she makes with standards. These standards may be based on social comparisons, on the particular person’s aspiration level, on the person’s past, or on his or her ideals. If people exceed these standards, they will be satisfied; but if they fall short of these standards, they will experience unhappiness.

Accordingly, happiness could be increased either by increasing one’s accomplishments or by limiting one’s aspirations.
The most important factor in happiness is good int...

We need small pleasures on a fairly routine basis, and a few longer-term pleasures to provide something to look forward to.

• Seek work and leisure that engage your skills. Happy people are often absorbed in tasks they find challenging but not overwhelming.

• Exercise. An avalanche of recent studies reveals that aerobic exercise is a powerful antidote for depression and anxiety.

• Give priority to close relationships. The mutual support and self-disclosure in committed relationships are another antidote to misery. If you are married, resolve to nurture your relationship, to not take your partner for granted, to display to your spouse the sort of kindness that you display to others, to play and share together.

• Take care of the soul. Actively religious people tend to report more happiness and to cope better with crises. Faith provides a support community, a sense of life’s meaning, a reason to focus beyond self, and a timeless perspective on life’s temporary ups and downs.

In addition, studies show that the happiest people often have:

• fit and healthy bodies

• realistic goals and expectations

• positive self-esteem

• feelings of control

• optimism

• outgoingness

• supportive relationships that allow companionship and confiding

• challenging work and active leisure, punctuated by sufficient rest and retreat

• a faith that entails communal support, purpose, self-acceptance, outward focus, and hope

One thing that people today believe leads to happiness is money. Although only a few would agree that money can literally buy happiness (even after hours of watching “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”), many people feel that a little more money would make them happier.

Look what’s happened to the values of entering college students. The percentage
who say it's "very important" that they "become very well-off financially" has nearly doubled since 1970, from 40 to 75 percent. That topped the list of 19 aspirations, surpassing "raising a family" and "helping others in difficulty." It's the new American dream: life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness.

But does wealth produce well-being? Have people in rich countries (such as West Germany during the 1980s) been consistently happier than folks in not-so-rich countries (such as Ireland)? Are people with high incomes, including those who've won lotteries or been listed among the 100 richest Americans, happier than folks with middle incomes? Have we become happier as a people thanks to our doubled real incomes since the mid-fifties?

The answers are no, no, no, and no. Wealth is like health. Its utter absence can make you miserable. But once your real needs are met, having more provides diminishing emotional dividends. A boost in income or possessions can make us happy temporarily. But soon we adapt, and begin lusting for a bigger fix.

Compared to 1960, the America of today has doubled spending power (thanks partly to the great increase in women's employment). We also have twice as many cars per person, color TVs, VCRs, microwaves, answering machines, computers, and $12 billion a year worth of brand-name athletic shoes.

But what has this economic growth meant for morale? Over the same period, death rates have soared. Teen suicide has tripled. Divorce rates have doubled. The percentage of children born to single parents has sextupled (pun intended). The violent crime rate has boomed. Surely Al Gore was correct when he wrote that "the accumulation of material goods is at an all-time high, but so is the number of people who feel an emptiness in their lives."

We've not only come to place greater emphasis on money and possessions, but also on the pursuit of individual self-realization. The pop psychology of our age urges us to "get in touch with yourself. Accept yourself. Be true to yourself. Assert your individual rights." Carl Rogers expressed our individualism: "The only question which matters is, 'Am I living in a way which...truly expresses me?'"

But as we finish this millennium, one hears voices, including many feminists and those familiar with Asian and Third World countries, saying that the current definition of happiness is not only too materialistic but also too individualistic. It's good to accept ourselves. But it's also good to value close relationships, to be sensitive and responsive to others, to give and receive support. To be interdependent, not just independent.

And it's good—as the new communitarian movement insists—to balance our celebration of individual rights with a parallel concern for social responsibilities and well-being. We need to define a ground between "me-thinking" and "we-thinking."

Alex C. Michalos, Ph.D.
University of Guelph, Ontario

A Portfolio

I define happiness as a relatively long-lasting, positive feeling and at-titude. From my research, the best way to get there is to have a portfolio of desires and interests—some short-range goals and some long-range goals. The short ones so that you can get small pleasures on a fairly routine basis with relatively low cost, and the longer ones so that you have something to look forward to and to go after in life.

Short-run pleasures, for instance, might include music. In my case, I like Motown music, and I have some records and tapes around that I like to listen to. For longer-term pleasure, I'm a feminist, so I work in little ways for the achievement of equal opportunity for women.

It's very important to keep this portfolio going, not to let these interests die out in light of other aspects of your life, such as work. They must also be realistic—an inter-est in music is one thing dreaming of becoming a rock star will not likely lead you to happiness unless you're one in a million. When people get a good assessment of what is possible and want those things that are ultimately achievable—and then begin to close the gap between the two—they find ultimate happiness.

I conducted a survey of 18,000 undergraduates in 39 countries and found that married students, particularly married women, were the happiest. Second happiest were married males, third were unmarried females, and the least happy of the lot were unmarried males. The most important factor in happiness is good interpersonal relations—with friends, family, lovers, etc. They contribute the biggest bang in terms of happiness, and are much more important than income, for instance, or looks. Next to relations, self-esteem is also important, as is physical health.

Contrary to popular opinion, there is only a somewhat modest correlation between income and happiness, but it is much less so than people imagine. Material items are also way overrated. But one of the most remarkable things, I think, is that the definition, in my mind, of happiness hasn't changed much. People have always needed a portfolio of interests in their lives. And if you look at the descriptions of what makes people happy, they've remained incredibly similar over the years: healthy bodies, good, productive jobs, love, family, friends. And, on the internal side, contentment, piece of mind, satisfaction.

There really has been amazing stability of the idea of happiness across time. We still believe, for instance, in the social-comparison hypothesis—the idea that happiness is a function of the perceived gap between what we have and what we think others have. And the original concept goes all the way back to Aristotle.

Remember that the "Big Bang" achievements are not as important, in terms of life satisfaction, as the sum total of all the little moments. We need to cultivate an appreciation for the little things in life. Being able to recognize the everyday pleasures is every bit as vital as achieving new ones.

In this sense, happy people tend to be more active. They're not "contented cows." When you have enormous resources in terms of internal good feeling about your self, you have an inner sense of buoyancy and are better able to think about doing things to make yourself happier. You tend not to sit back and be content, but identify and achieve what makes you happy.