

# BANKING ON Happiness...



Happiness coach Claire Massingham, of the Happiness Bank ([www.happinessbank.com.au](http://www.happinessbank.com.au)), says building sustainable happiness is just like opening a rainy day savings account. Her advice: make small and regular deposits.

Everybody wants to be happy, but not everybody knows how! Research shows that happier people are more engaged, more motivated, more resilient and better able to bounce back from illness, more creative, not to mention nicer to be around.

It's true, some people are born happier, with research out of Australia's The Happiness Institute attributing 30 to 50 per cent of happiness to genetic predisposition. For most of us, however, happiness is a choice we make every day. A choice that includes not just "positive" emotions like joy, elation and pride, but so-called "negative" emotions such as anger, sadness and anxiety.

I know this from personal experience. Three of the most challenging times in my life were coping with postnatal depression, overcoming ovarian cancer and moving my family back into my parents' home after my husband was made redundant.

I hobbled through that period, reminding myself that "all things must pass". But it wasn't until I applied the principles of positive psychology to my own life that I started to understand the true meaning of happiness. This involved a conscious change in thinking patterns and positive action, stepping out of my comfort zone, identifying strengths, setting goals and trying new things.

Perhaps the biggest lesson, and something I now "pay forward" through my work, is that happiness (in many ways comparable to fitness) can be successfully worked at.

## START MAKING DEPOSITS INTO YOUR "HAPPINESS ACCOUNT"

Happiness currency is based on the five pillars of the positive psychology movement led by Dr Martin Seligman.

**1 Positive emotions:** Gratitude tops the list. Think about keeping a journal of things/experiences you're thankful for. Don't be shy in

conveying your appreciation to others, perhaps people you've never thanked properly.

**2 Engagement:** Discover your own unique set of strengths rather than focusing on ways to "fix" weaknesses. Think about activities that truly engage you. For example, I joined a community choir, not because I'm the best singer in the world, but because singing helps me "lose" myself. Whatever it is – art, dancing, yoga, meditation – the real benefit stems from activities that are challenging and absorbing, not to mention fun!

**3 Relationships:** Life is not a solo journey – something especially true for people living with diabetes, relying on and drawing strength from family, friends and wider support networks. Take time to nurture, heal and enjoy the many and varied relationships in your life. I recently read an article about "diaversaries" – celebrating when life changed, with a diabetes diagnosis involving a focus on healthy living. Successfully managing diabetes is worth celebrating, which by its very nature involves others. So mark the milestones: book a massage with your partner, a theatre outing with friends or dinner at your favourite restaurant.

**4 Meaning:** Life is not all about you! Research has proven that when people give unconditionally to others, it creates a sense of meaning and purpose. Even simple gestures, like helping someone laden with shopping bags or cooking a meal for a neighbour. Plus, be kind to yourself and learn to forgive.

**5 Achievement:** Adopting a healthy lifestyle; going for a walk; decreasing your waist measurement; writing a letter to a friend – these are all achievements. Think about setting two or three meaningful, measurable goals and devote time to achieving them. Trying something new also ranks as an achievement. Try my green smoothie recipe (on page 16).