



'A HAPPY PERSON IS A HEALTHY PERSON.' HOW FAR WOULD YOU AGREE?

[2021 GCE O-Level Exam Question]

By Sng Ee Ping

[Two-sided - Agree to a large extent]



From expensive supplements to extensive exercise regimes and strict diets, people of all ages and times are constantly looking for the elixir to good health. Yet, a ¹deluge of scientific research has suggested that the potion for better health might simply be staying happy. I agree to a large extent that a happy person is a healthy person.

Most studies suggest that happiness improves physical health. Laura Kubzansky, a researcher, conducted a study on over 6000 men and women aged 25 to 74 for 20 years, and found that happiness, a display of enthusiasm and optimism, engagement in life and an ability to face stress, appears to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by half, and helps one avoid or manage diseases such as heart attack, stroke, diabetes and depression. Kubzansky also found that children who displayed a sunny outlook at age seven reported better general health and fewer illnesses 30 years later. There are also suggestions that negative

emotions could result in people making certain lifestyle choices such as an unhealthy diet and excessive smoking and drinking that, in turn, result in poorer health.

Sometimes, happiness can provide the emotional ²adrenaline to confront life's toughest challenges. America's Jane Marczewski, popularly known as *Nightbirde, was battling with cancer when she received a golden buzzer at her audition at 'America's Got Talent' in 2021. Her ability to stay positive, despite being given a two percent chance to survive and her husband wanting a divorce, astounded millions across the globe. While being happy did not cure her cancer or save her marriage, her optimistic outlook propelled her to pursue her dream as a singer and songwriter, and even encouraged many people to stay hopeful and not give up. There is no doubt that a strong dose of happiness can help one cope better when an illness strikes and have better mental health.

*Nightbirde died on 19 Feb 2022.

E

EXPOSITORY



However, too much happiness can come at the price of health. When people are excessively happy, they tend to ³blithely ignore the risks that surround them. They then tend to engage in riskier behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption or binge eating. This can cause physical and psychological harm. A 1993 study by a group of psychologists also found that school-aged children who were rated as being very happy had a greater risk of mortality when they were adults. Thus, the function of happiness should not be overrated.

With the strong correlation between happiness and good health, there are good reasons to keep ourselves happy. No matter what our circumstances



Word Bank:



- ① **deluge:**
a lot of something
- ② **adrenaline:**
a hormone secreted by the adrenal glands that increases rates of blood circulation, breathing, and carbohydrate metabolism and prepares muscles for exertion
- ③ **blithely:**
happily and without feeling or showing any worry, especially when there is a reason to be worried

References:

1. Happiness and health, from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2011.
2. It's official: Happiness really can improve health, from Time, 20 July 2017.
3. Rich people don't just live longer, they also get more healthy years, from The New York Times, 16 January 2020.

are, we can do something to boost our emotional vitality, and do our best to keep healthy. We only have to remember to experience happiness in moderation and not take it to the extremes.

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METACOGNITIVE
checkPOINT

What are my questions about the topic so far?



'A HAPPY PERSON IS A HEALTHY PERSON.' HOW FAR WOULD YOU AGREE?

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[One-sided - Totally Disagree]



Does feeling upbeat keep colds and headaches at bay? Does feeling hopeful and positive protect us from heart diseases, hypertension and diabetes? Does a happy person live longer? The link between happiness and health has been extensively researched for decades and many studies have convinced us that happiness brings benefits, including good health. This has resulted in a burgeoning demand for motivational speakers, an endless supply of mood-lifting supplements and a multitude of posters that encourage positive thinking. However, I do not agree that a happy person is a healthy person.

Being happy does not guarantee that one is going to be healthy, just as abstaining from smoking might not guarantee one will not have lung cancer.

In fact, a study in 2015 on one million women found that happiness had no effect on mortality rate. Moreover, there are other factors that influence one's health and longevity such as a person's ¹genetic predisposition towards a particular disease or even a person's socio-economic status. A wealthy person may be healthier because of the ability to live and eat better and the access to better treatment when ill. In a study on English and American adults, it is reported that wealthy men and women do not just live longer but get eight to nine more healthy years after 50 than the poorest individuals in the United States and England. In short, one can be unhappy but still be relatively healthy because of the ability to live and eat better.



Some research even suggests that positive thinking can be dangerous. Positive thinking, when taken to the extreme, can cause a person to be unhinged from reality. For example, a person who thinks that staying happy and positive can help him recover from an illness like cancer but later fails to recover from it, may blame himself for not being chirpier. In this case, positive thinking may potentially be the ²slippery slope for victim blaming. The pursuit of happiness is also associated with serious mental health problems such as depression.

Moreover, happiness is not always the best emotion for our mental well-being, for all situations in our lives. Instead, unpleasant feelings can be beneficial to a person's well-being. Researchers believe that unpleasant feelings such as sadness and anger can help us make sense of our challenges and experiences in a way that supports psychological well-being. These bad feelings

are also pivotal in alerting us about a health issue, relationship or an important matter that requires our attention. For example, if I have behaved nastily towards my good friend, the feelings of guilt and sadness might motivate me to apologise and ask for forgiveness. The restoration of a broken relationship can be a boost to one's mental well-being.

Not all types of happiness are good for us either. Some forms of happiness may actually cause us to be dysfunctional and affect our mental health. For example, pride, a pleasant feeling associated with happiness, can sometimes rob us of the ability to empathise with others or understand another's perspective. This anti-social behaviour can cause people around us, including our loved ones, to turn away from us, and this could, in turn, make us feel alienated. This can take a toll on our mental and even physical health.



Word Bank:

- 1 **genetic predisposition:**
an increased likelihood of developing certain diseases due to the genetic characteristics of the person
- 2 **slippery slope:**
a bad situation or habit that, after it has started, is likely to get very much worse
- 3 **sanguine:**
positive and hoping for good things

References:

1. Happier people keep healthier as they age, from Live Science, 21 Jan 2014.
2. Can positive thinking be negative? From Scientific American, 1 May 2011.
3. Negative emotions key to well-being, from Scientific American, 1 May 2013.

In trying to experience happiness, we should remember that striving for happiness as an end in itself can be self-defeating, and does not necessarily lead to better health. Striving for good health is more complex, involving many factors. We should also avoid suppressing negative emotions and be careful not to take optimism and pleasant feelings to an extreme. After all, one will surely experience setbacks and conflicts in life. Instead, learning to cope with negative emotions with a realistic ³sanguine attitude is key to a person's good health.



METACOGNITIVE POINT:

REFLECTION

“What are my thoughts about the link between health and happiness after reading Essays E1 and E2?”



Part 1: Question Analysis

When analysing a question, we first identify the key words. Key words can be content words like *nouns*, *verbs*, *adverbs* or *adjectives*. Sometimes, we need to define them especially if they are ambiguous (words can have more than one meaning or interpretation). Next, we also need to identify the 'WH' question word like *What*, *Why* and *How*.

Let's look at the key words in this question.

'A **happy** person is a **healthy** person.' **How far** would you agree?



Let's examine paragraphs 2 and 3 of Essay E1 to see how the writer defines the content words:

Paragraph 2:

Most studies suggest that happiness improves **physical health**. Laura Kubzansky, a researcher, conducted a study on over 6000 men and women aged 25 to 74 for 20 years, and found that happiness, a display of enthusiasm and optimism, engagement in life and an ability to face stress, appears to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by half, and helps one avoid or manage diseases like heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and depression. Kubzansky also found that children who displayed a sunny outlook at age seven reported **better general health and fewer illnesses 30 years later**. There are also suggestions that negative emotions could result in people making certain lifestyle choices like an **unhealthy diet, excessive smoking and drinking that result in poorer health**.

Content word: health

Here, the writer defines physical health and gives examples that are related to physical health.

Content word: happy

Here, happiness is defined as a display of enthusiasm and optimism, engagement in life and an ability to face stress. It is also about having a sunny outlook. This is contrasted to having negative emotions.

Paragraph 3:

Sometimes, happiness can provide the **emotional adrenaline to confront life's toughest challenges**. American Jane Marczewski, popularly known as Nightbirde, was battling with cancer when she received a golden buzzer at her audition at 'America's Got Talent' in 2021. Her ability to stay positive despite being given a two percent chance to survive and her husband wanting a divorce, astounded millions across the globe. While being happy did not save her from cancer and her marriage, her optimistic outlook propelled her to **pursue her dream**.

Content word: health

Here, the writer offers a different perspective of health: in the example given, Jane Marczewski had challenges in physical, **emotional and mental health** that motivated her to pursue her dream and encourage others.

as a singer and songwriter, and even encouraged many people to stay hopeful and not give up. There is no doubt that a strong dose of happiness can help one cope better when an illness strikes and have better mental health, though it may not always prevent one or heal us from one.

Content word: happy

Here, happiness is associated with positivity and an optimistic outlook despite illness.

Now, we look at how the phrase, 'How far', is being addressed in the essay. 'How far' suggests that the writer has the freedom to decide the extent to which he or she agrees or disagrees with the statement.

There are two possible positions:

1. Two-sided (but in favour of one position)

In Essay E1, the writer takes a two-sided approach, but takes a position that is strongly in favour of one side (agree to a large extent). She devotes two paragraphs (paragraphs 2 and 3) to showing how one can enjoy good physical, emotional and mental health by being happy. Paragraph 4 gives a different perspective to how too much happiness can be dangerous. However, the writer still agrees with the statement because there is stronger evidence to show that happiness does indeed lead to better health.

2. One-sided

In Essay E2, the writer takes a one-sided stand, totally disagreeing with the statement. This is similar to an argumentative essay, except that there is no need for a rebuttal paragraph.

Part 2: Using Facts to Support View

Facts are pieces of information that are generally known or have been proven to be true. Often research or studies that have been done can help us establish the facts. It is important that we use established facts in our writing to support our views to show credibility. Let us see how the writer uses facts in Essay E2 to support her view.

Paragraph 2:

Being happy does not guarantee that one is going to be healthy, just as abstaining from smoking might not guarantee one will not have lung cancer. In fact, a study in 2015 on one million women, found that happiness had no effect on mortality rate. Moreover, there are other factors that influence one's health and longevity such as a person's genetic predisposition towards a particular disease or even a person's socio-economic status. A wealthy person could be healthier because of the ability to live and eat better and the access to better treatment when ill. In a study on English and American adults, it is reported that wealthy men and women do not just live longer but get eight to nine more healthy years after 50 than the poorest individuals in the United States and England. In short, one can be unhappy but still be relatively healthy because of the ability to live and eat better.

Fact:

A happier person may not always be healthier as there are other factors that determine good health.

This fact is established by the body of research that has been done over the years. The writer highlights a particular study that was done to establish this fact.