**https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/03/why-does-happiness-matter**

**Thought for the Week:**

**18th March - Happiness**

**Why does happiness matter?**

Being happy is not just about feeling good. Research shows that it also makes us healthier, more productive – and nicer.

**D**oes happiness matter? People react to this question in surprisingly different ways. Some suggest that there are far more significant things to worry about; others see happiness as vitally important and something that every human being ultimately wants in life. To explore this conundrum, we need to start by looking at what happiness actually means.

Happiness relates to how we feel, but it is more than just a passing mood. We are emotional beings and experience a wide range of feelings on a daily basis. Negative emotions – such as fear and anger – help us to get away from danger or defend ourselves. And positive emotions – such as enjoyment and hope – help us to connect with others and build our capacity to cope when things go wrong.

Trying to live a happy life is not about denying negative emotions or pretending to feel joyful all the time. We all encounter adversity and it’s completely natural for us to feel anger, sadness, frustration and other negative emotions as a result. To suggest otherwise would be to deny part of the human condition. Happiness is about being able to make the most of the good times – but also to cope effectively with the inevitable bad times, in order to experience the best possible life overall. Or, in the words of the biochemist turned Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard: “Happiness is a deep sense of flourishing, not a mere pleasurable feeling or fleeting emotion but an optimal state of being.”

One popular misconception about happiness is that happy people are somehow more likely to be lazy or ineffective. In fact research shows the opposite is true: happiness doesn’t just feel good, it actually [leads to a wide range of benefits](http://apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/bul-1316803.pdf) for our performance, health, relationships and more.

For example, economists at Warwick University showed different groups of people either a positive film clip or a neutral film clip and then asked them to carry out standard workplace tasks under paid conditions. The [people who were primed to feel happy were 11% more productive](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressreleases/new_study_shows) than their peers, even after controlling for age, IQ and other factors. Similarly, researchers at UCL has discovered that people who are happy as young adults go on to [earn more than their peers](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1211/20112012-happy-children-wealthy-adults) later in life.

In healthcare, doctors who are happy have been found to make [faster and more accurate diagnoses](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749597897927345), even when this happiness was induced simply by giving them the small gift of a sugary sweet. In education, schools that focus on children’s social and emotional wellbeing experience significant [gains in academic attainment](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x/full) as well as improvements in pupil behaviour. Happiness has also been linked to better decision-making and [improved creativity](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18954157).

So, rather than success being the key to happiness, research shows that happiness could in fact be the key to success.