

The Health Benefits of Happiness

Margie Bissinger, MS, PT, CHC



Rebekah Kelley: Welcome to the Humanized podcast, your health personalized. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley. Today we have a great guest. Margie Bissinger is here with us today to discuss the health benefits of happiness. But before we get started, let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts, and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders on personalized health at HumanizedhHealth.com.

Margie, welcome. So happy to have you on the show today.

Margie Bissinger: Oh, well, thanks so much for inviting me. So happy to be here.

Rebekah Kelley: Before we get started, I just did want to share a little bit of background information about you for our listeners and viewers. Margie is a physical therapist, integrative health coach, happiness trainer, lecture, author. She specializes in helping people with osteoporosis, osteopenia, improve their bone health through an integrative comprehensive approach utilizing whole foods, exercise, supplements, mind-body relaxation techniques, and happiness training. Awesome!

Margie Bissinger: Well, thank you,

Rebekah Kelley: Margie, you're a physical therapist and health coach. How did you get into teaching happiness? That seems a little bit of a transition.

Margie Bissinger: Yeah. You know, it's funny. It starts way back in my 20s, when I had gone through a bad situation myself, and I moved to Chicago. I'm not going to go into that because it's too long, but basically I'm working in an outpatient clinic in Chicago with chronic pain, people with neck pain, back pain, TMJ. And they're like, Margie, you're so happy. Had they only known what I had done through they wouldn't be saying that, but at that moment, it hit me that happiness was an internal job and not based on my circumstances. And I said, hmm, everyone I'm working with is so miserable. I'm going to start teaching them what got me through my situation – and miracles started happening.

Back pain, neck pain, jaw pain, headaches were going away much quicker than with just traditional physical therapy. And that's when I saw the power of what I now call happiness habits, how it transforms lives. So since that time, and that's been over 35 years ago, I've been incorporating that with every patient I see, every program I do. And I just feel it's the foundation of health, that when you have those habits built in, it can just change everything. And so that's how it started. It's just been so rewarding, and I see lives change every day.

Rebekah Kelley: So when you say happiness, cause you actually... I caught whenever you were describing it, you separated the situation you were in, was different than your happiness. So a lot of times we think, oh, well, I go and do something, I buy

something, it makes me happy. We think if we do something, it changes our situation. But you just said you were, even in the situation you were in, if they would have known, they would have really... So when you say that, what do you mean?

Margie Bissinger: No, that's really a great question. Well, first of all, the happiness I'm talking about is not having a fake smile plastered to your face. It's a deep sense of peace and wellbeing that doesn't depend on your circumstances. But the other thing I recently added to that definition: living your life in color. That definition didn't sound so exciting – but to really enjoy your life. So I think the combination of the two.

But you said something really great that I just want to comment on because, people think... they've done a study, they've really looked at what's called the happiness set point, you know, what determines your base level of happiness. And we all have one, it's sort of like a thermostat – we can be happier, we can be sadder, but we all hover around this. And they found that circumstances were only 10%. That's all. And this is what everyone thinks, just like you said – if I get that other job, or when I make more money, I'll be happy when I'm in a better relationship. But it only constitutes 10%.

So you want to know what the other is? [Laughing.]

Rebekah Kelley: Yes [laughing], what is it?

Margie Bissinger: Well, 50% is genetics, but the good news with that is now they've found with epigenetics, we can even affect how, you know, turning on and off our genes. But the other 40%, the other 40% are your habits. So that's the great news. We have so much room to change this happiness set point and we can increase it regardless of where we start from. It's all really good news.

Rebekah Kelley: So – you've mentioned the happiness set point as being our base level of happiness and that we can actually increase it. Is there, I mean, how can we do that?

Margie Bissinger: Well, it's through happiness habits. Cause that's the 40%. Plus, we can affect our, you know, if our genes express themselves, as well.

So there's many different areas in terms of happiness. I look at it like a house when I teach the class. I have a happiness class that I teach – but I look at it like a house, different areas. So it starts with the foundation. You're taking responsibility. And I think the big thing there, so many people are victims in life where, you know, oh poor me. And instead of being...

Rebekah Kelley: That's it right now. Yes.

Margie Bissinger: Yes. So many people... and that is one of the fastest ways to unhappiness, because when you're in that state, oh poor me, nothing can be done, versus just a change of mind. It's just so simple to be a victor and take responsibility and look at solutions instead of problems.

So that's always where I start the foundation. Then there's different pillars – the mind, the heart, to learn certain habits, to live with an open heart, how to rewire your brain for positivity (because we are really wired for negativity), connecting to a power greater than yourself, your health (because that takes care), who we surround ourselves with, as well as living with purpose and passion. So all those seven areas constitute what I call that deep level of peace and wellbeing. And also joy. [Laughs]

Rebekah Kelley: You also started off by talking about how you were working with helping people, right?

Margie Bissinger: Yes.

Rebekah Kelley: Helping with their health. So my assumption is, based upon that, it does definitely, if you're happy, obviously it helps your health. But HOW does it do that? And also, does it affect your immune system? Cause I'm assuming that, kind of as our baseline, it's kind of what supports our health, right? So can you talk more about that?

Margie Bissinger: Yes. I mean, they've done studies on this, which is just so incredible. They've shown that people who are happier on an average of 9 years longer, and they're 35% less likely to get sick. They also have 47% reduction in sleep disorders, which, you know, affects everything. So many people heal better. And I've seen... I saw with my patients, I just couldn't get over how chronic pain was reduced and people really recovered so much quicker. And you would see life returning and joy and, you know, we have one life to live. Why shouldn't we be happy and really love our life?

Rebekah Kelley: Now you talked about how 40% of it is habits, right? Did I get that number?

Margie Bissinger: Yup.

Rebekah Kelley: ...Is habits. So, can you give us an example of what a happiness habit is that we could use to increase our set point?

Margie Bissinger: Yes. I'm going to start with, I'm going to start with our thoughts because the sad thing is, 80% of the average person's thoughts are negative. We're sort of wired that way because in the caveman days, we had to be aware of a tiger

lurking versus someone saying, you know, giving us a compliment. So, here's the quickest way that I found to rewire your brain for happiness.

Number one. Look for the good. You know, so often we focus on what's not working and what's bad in our lives – but focus on the good. And if that's hard to do, pretend you're a detective and you're giving out Academy Awards for the cutest dog, the kindest person, the nicest tree, whatever it is, just to start getting your mind thinking, what's good – cause so many of us have so much good in our lives, but we're just not focusing on it. So number one, to focus on what's good.

Number two. When something good happens, you can actually change your neuropathways by savoring it for at least 20 seconds. So when someone gives you a compliment, says like, ah, it was nothing... oh, thank you, I really worked hard on that! You know, soak it in, or you see a sunset instead of just looking at it for a second. Stop, enjoy it, take it in for 20 seconds, and that will help change the neuropathways.

And the third one with this is that we'll get negative thoughts and you can't, you know, there are techniques for that. But don't really absorb it. Accept it. Okay, I got that thought. But then, think of three true, but positive things, as well. So if you'd start doing all that, I promise you you'll start rewiring your brain for positivity, and you won't be swarmed with negative thoughts.

I've been doing this for years and it just makes such a big difference because our brain and our thoughts are so powerful.

Rebekah Kelley: I find, and this is probably just a habit again, that lowers my set point of happiness, or it could be that, you know, I maybe was trained this way, but like, if I get a compliment, especially when I was younger, I would be, like, embarrassed by it. But I love the concept of savoring it and just being like, yes, thank you. Yeah, I really worked. I mean that just to kind of lull around in it, it almost feels like a guilty pleasure.

Margie Bissinger: It's really crazy that we're sort of scared. We're scared to really absorb the happiness and maybe we'll jinx something, but that's not true. What you focus on grows. So when you absorb those compliments, more work grows and it just, when you're happy, everyone around you is happy, or it's contagious. So, no. So take in all those compliments, Rebekah, and just take in them. And you know, when someone tells you you're doing a great job with this broadcast – thank you! You know, I work really hard at it. [Laughs]

Rebekah Kelley: So I think part of it too, is in a way I kind of think I'm trying to look for, like, the problems that could pop up, right? So instead of, that's the good thing, I don't have to worry about that... where's the bad thing? Like I got to worry about

that. I got to focus on that. And then I'm not in the moment of the happiness, of being focused on a really positive thing. And it's a little like, it's just very easy to do in a day, right? Like, okay, I don't have to worry about this one, but I'm worried about that one – but then that would lower my happiness set point.

Margie Bissinger: Right. And worry, where's worry getting you. That's the thing. We worry, but it's sort of like – I know there's a joke. It's like a rocking chair. You work hard at it, but you get nowhere. It doesn't get you anywhere. So sometimes when we examine what we are doing and just make these tweaks, we feel so much better. Why not live in the moment? Enjoy and, yeah, you're in something great, just take it in, absorb it, and it will change the pathways. That's, what's so exciting. So yeah

Rebekah Kelley: It's like the fake it til you make it, in a way, but not really. You're not really faking it. You're just focusing on the part that's really good, right? And the part that isn't maybe as good, you're just not giving it as much attention so that it does kind of... the other, the good grows.

Margie Bissinger: Yeah, exactly. Not that we, we don't throw it in the closet, but there are techniques to deal with that. But so many of us are swarming, and that's all we're focusing on. That's what our life becomes. So when we focus on the good that does exist – and we all have amazing things that exist – sometimes we just don't put the attention on it.

Rebekah Kelley: Yes. Thanks Margie. Those are really valuable insights. Margie Bissinger can be found at www.MargieBissinger.com. That's M A R G I E B I S S I N G E R dot com. And let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts, and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders on personalized health at HumanizedHealth.com. Thank you very much for being here.