



My best discovery was the work of psychologist Martin Seligman, past president of the American Psychological Association (APA) and author of the book, *Authentic Happiness*. Seligman is leading a relatively new movement called Positive Psychology, with a goal of finding out what makes human beings flourish. While Seligman's own research focused on optimism, a trait associated with good physical health, less depression and mental illness, longer life and greater happiness, his tenure as APA president was spent encouraging researchers to further explore what does and does not make people feel satisfied with life.

I can still remember receiving that dreaded letter from AARP - the one that made it official- I was now a (gulp!) senior citizen. My greatest fear was that aging was not necessarily going to be a happy event. I was keenly aware of the many negative stereotypes that portray older people as isolated, depressed, sexless, and basically useless. I experienced mild depression when I was younger, and gradually learned to overcome the low moods and lack of motivation that often accompanied them. And in that process, I made a commitment to myself that I never wanted to experience depression again. So I set out to find just exactly what it is that contributes to happiness as we grow older, with a goal of implementing the strategies in my own life. What I ended up with is good advice for all of us at any age.

Surprisingly, the things we think would ring our inner chimes, such as wealth, a high IQ or advanced education, don't necessarily pave the road to happiness. Nor does youth (thank goodness). Studies from the Centers for Disease Control show that older people are more consistently satisfied with their lives than the young (I'm feeling happier already) So, what is it that brings us true satisfaction and fulfillment.

In his book, *Authentic Happiness* (Simon and Schuster), Seligman notes that there are three components of happiness: pleasure (which he describes as "the smiley-face piece"), engagement (the depth of involvement with one's family, work, romance, and hobbies) and meaning (using personal Strengths to serve a greater good). Our job is to take these findings and incorporate them into our lives with the same commitment that we might give to a weight loss program. This, of course, is the challenge since many of us tend to shy away from self-improvement activities that are particularly daunting.

Fortunately, psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of the book, *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (Penguin Press), has developed an eight step program that with a little dedication, can easily become a part of our daily lives. Simply following these Eight Steps towards a More Satisfying Life will almost guarantee a substantial boost in your level of happiness and life satisfaction:

1) Count your blessings. One way to do this is with a "gratitude journal." Write down three to five things for which you are currently thankful. Do this once a week and keep it fresh by varying your entries as much as possible.