

Do you know what makes you happy? Read about how to design your life to maximise happiness.

Do you know what makes you happy or do you just think you know? At first glance, these two questions look like the same thing. If you think something makes you happy, then it must make you happy. After all, you know yourself, don't you?

Brainstorm a list of all the things that make you happy. Just write whatever comes into your mind without thinking about it too much. Now look at that list and tick all the ones that are fun or enjoyable. Probably most of them, right? So, if you could spend most of your time doing all this fun stuff, you'd be really happy, surely?

Well, maybe not. For most people, only doing things for fun isn't enough for long-term happiness. That's because, according to author of *Happiness by Design* Paul Dolan, your happiness depends on a 'pleasure–purpose balance'. If most of the things on your list of what makes you happy fall under the category of 'pleasure', then that might be what you think makes you happy. But what will actually make you happy is balancing them out with activities that give your life purpose.

We tend to know straight away if something is enjoyable, but knowing what brings meaning and value requires more thought. For example, most people will say that air pilots have jobs with clear purpose. They are responsible for hundreds of people and fly all over the world. But in reality, their day-to-day work might involve spending time in boring hotels or stuck in airports waiting for flights, and routine actions they've performed hundreds of times. Those activities might not feel very meaningful – and they're probably not fun either. Just like everyone else, the pilot needs balance in their work and life to be happy.

There are different ways we can find purpose in things. Some activities might be motivating because they work towards the 'greater good' of society or the world around us. Or you might feel that what you do contributes to a team you're working in. Or you might be motivated by a sense of making measurable progress. For a doctor, that could be the greater good of helping people avoid operations or serious illnesses. Or it could be that their work helps their hospital run smoothly so that patients wait for less time. If they have a lot of boring reports to write, they can set goals for how many they can write in one afternoon.

For those still in education, you can think of your 'job' as studying and passing exams. You've probably noticed how easy it is to do well in subjects you enjoy. But with subjects you don't like, grades can start to fall and it's much harder to stay motivated. You can't avoid them, so you need to find a sense of purpose in those subjects. You probably can't find much in the way of 'greater good' in getting a good grade on that boring homework your teacher set. Realistically, society won't benefit from you getting an A in a subject you hate. But can you find a way to be part of a study team? Maybe you could find others who struggle with that subject and you all take responsibility for working extra hard on one aspect of it until you're good at that one part. Then you can teach it to the others in the group, so your purpose becomes about helping the team. This also increases happiness, because spending time with people you like increases pleasure. Or you can find purpose in progress, for example dividing a task into smaller tasks and taking a reward or a break as you complete each one.

Go back to your list of things that make you happy. How many of them are activities that add to your sense of purpose? Can you add to the list now you know that purpose is important for happiness?

Now you have your list, you need to find balance. But balance doesn't mean you have to make pleasure–purpose a 50/50 split. It means achieving the ratio that works for you, so that might be 60/40 or 70/30, and, of course, some activities might bring both pleasure and purpose. Paul Dolan's book talks about the idea of 'deciding, designing, doing'. First decide what things in life bring you pleasure and/or purpose – which is what your two lists are for. Then, don't just think about doing these activities, design your life so you do as many of them as possible.

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It's easy to make excuses not to do things because they're not convenient. For example, you might love riding a bike but never have time to do it. But it's up to you to build a routine where you can use it to go to school or the library or the shops. If you live too far from those things, take your bike on the bus or train and get off early so you can cycle the rest of the way. If you go in the car, put your bike in the back, get out of the car halfway and cycle the rest. Or move to a place where you can cycle more. Some aspects of our lives are the result of good or bad luck, but we can still design the parts that are under our control to maximise happiness.

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