

5 Reasons People Tend to Get Happier as They Grow Older

Happiness has become a modern obsession. Searching for it, holding on to it, and wishing it on our loved ones have all become motivating forces for how we live our lives.

We also use happiness as a measuring stick for life decisions. If a job doesn't make us happy, we quit it. If a relationship stops making us happy, we leave it.

Happiness has lodged itself at the center of our lives and we make some drastic choices desperately trying to reach it. This is especially true for people in their 30s and 40s, who are at the highest risk of using antidepressants and developing mood disorders [than any other age group](#).

They are also the biggest consumers of the [self-help industry](#), spending their money on well-being retreats, traveling, online happiness-boosting activities or pop psychology books. Ironically, research shows that the pursuit of happiness might not only make us [less happy](#), but also [more lonely](#), as we often end up cutting ourselves off from people who represent the lives that we want to leave behind.

So, if we are feeling unhappy today, can we hope for a better tomorrow? Fortunately, [research](#) suggests that we can, because regardless of our individual differences, we go through some natural changes in life that influence our happiness. These changes allow us to experience relatively high levels of happiness in our 20s, which then begin to tumble, reaching their lowest point in the late 30s and early 40s – when they start to climb again.

There are [five reasons for this natural upturn](#).

1. Time perspective

In most Western societies, we tend to spend our 20s and 30s creating our future. By our late 30s and early 40s, when we realize that a) we have not achieved what we hoped to [achieve](#), and b) our future is [shrinking rapidly](#), we have two options. We can begin to panic, or we can adjust to all these changes by redirecting our thoughts to the positive past. This is what most of us do, which results in us feeling more secure and happier, as we move into the later stages of our lives.

2. Emotional life

When we are young, we let our emotions [run wild](#). The higher they go, the lower they drop. It takes us years to control them. As we move into our 50s, they become more stable and we begin to achieve more serenity in [life](#). Apart from that, we are more drawn to [positivity](#) and are able to hold on to it for longer, which is another reason why we feel happier as we age.

3. Social network

In our 20s, our social network is likely to be thriving. We have new people coming into our lives all the time, be it colleagues from a new job, or the extra circles of friends and family of a new romantic partner. Then, as we enter our 30s, it all begins to [change](#). We no longer have the time nor the energy to nurture all our friendships, and people drop from our lives like flies.

Since we need social support to feel happier, this change can have a detrimental effect on our [well-being](#). However, as we move into our 50s, older and wiser, we begin to put more effort into the people in our lives, strengthening our [friendships](#). This can be another reason why we become happier later on in our lives.

4. Life events

Life events are like traffic. When the road is empty, it is easier to drive. As soon as it becomes busy, it is harder to cope. Research shows that both [traumatic events](#) and [daily hassles](#) are at their highest level when we reach midlife. Thereafter, they begin to slow down, as we learn how to cope with them more effectively. And we become happier as a result.

5. Predictability

It feels good to be able to predict what is going to happen next. It gives us a sense of mastery over our environment and fills us with the confidence that we can tackle anything that life throws at us. As we move along the years, we become better at foreseeing the consequences of our, and other people's, behaviors and become skilled at planning the best action to maneuver through [life challenges](#). Each day teaches us new life skills – and they make it easier for us to feel happier.



Happiness levels and wine – improving with age. [Shutterstock](#)

So it seems our lives do become happier as we age. Ironically, regardless of our age, when people are asked about the happiest times of their lives, they usually point to [their 20s](#), wrongly predicting that feelings of contentment will reduce as they get older.

In fact, it would be a good idea to relax and let nature take its course. Because with things actually improving with age, the uplifting truth is that we [all have an ever-increasing chance](#) of living happily ever after.

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