

# How Strangers Can Make You Happy



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## VOCABULARY:

- **stroke**  
/strōk/  
- n. a sudden disabling attack or loss of consciousness caused by an interruption in the flow of blood to the brain.  
ex. He was attacked by a sudden stroke.
- **contagious**  
/kənˈtājəs/  
- adj. (of an emotion, feeling, or attitude) likely to spread to and affect others. **syn. infectious; transmittable**  
ex. Her enthusiasm is contagious.
- **separation**  
/ˌsepəˈrāSH(ə)n/  
- n. the action or state of moving or being moved apart.  
**syn. disconnection; detachment**  
ex. The damage that might arise from the separation of parents and children.
- **influence**  
/ˈɪnflʊəns/  
- n. the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something; **syn. effect; impact**  
ex. I was still under the influence of my parents.
- **aging**  
/ˈājiŋ/  
- n. the process of growing old  
ex. The aging population is increasing.

What makes people happier: money or having happy friends and neighbors? Researchers from Harvard University and the University of California, San Diego, have found an answer as part of a study.

Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler based the study on the emotional health of almost five thousand people. They used information gathered over a period of twenty years, until two thousand three, in the Framingham Heart Study. That study began sixty years ago in Framingham, Massachusetts, to learn more about the risks of heart attack and **stroke**.

The new study found that friends of happy people had a greater chance of being happy themselves. And the smaller the physical distance between friends, the larger the effect they had on each other's happiness.

For example, a person was twenty percent more likely to feel happy if a friend living within one and a half kilometers was also happy. Having a happy neighbor who lived next door increased an individual's chance of being happy by thirty-four percent. The effects of friends' happiness lasted for up to a year.

The researchers found that happiness really is **contagious**. Sadness also spread among friends, but not as much as happiness.

People removed by as much as three degrees of **separation** still had an effect on a person's happiness. Three degrees of separation means the friend of a friend of a friend.

The study showed that having an extra five thousand dollars increased a person's chances of becoming happier by about two percent. But the researchers found that the **influence** of a friend of a friend of a friend can be greater than that.

Another finding is that people who are married or work together do not have as much of an effect on happiness as friends do.

The findings appeared in the British Medical Journal. The National Institute on **Aging** in the United States helped pay for the study.

The study is described as the first to demonstrate the indirect spread of happiness. In other words, that your emotions can be affected by someone you do not directly know.

Earlier studies by the two researchers described the effects of social networks on obesity and efforts to stop smoking. The new study shows that **happiness spreads through social networks like an emotional virus -- a virus people would be happy to catch.**

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What did Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler found in their study?
2. What institute had helped them pay for their study?
3. Do you agree with the findings of their study? Why or why not?
4. What usually make you happy?
5. Do you agree that happiness is contagious? How?
6. What are the benefits of staying a happy life?
7. How do you cheer a person up when he or she is sad?
8. Do you sometimes smile at strangers?
9. How do you build a good relationship with your neighbors or friends?
10. Do you still keep in touch with your former officemates or schoolmates?