

# Buying Happiness

SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY, author of *The How of Happiness*, shows you how to put a smile on your face with the pennies in your pocket.



## GENEROSITY

People who give charitably rank themselves as happier than people who don't, according to a 2008 study by the University of British Columbia. "Anonymous acts of kindness create feelings of happiness because they make us feel like a better person," Lyubomirsky says. "Being generous also makes you see others in a more positive light because generosity boosts positive emotions and those emotions create a halo effect, making you feel good about those around you."

- \$ Drop change into an expired parking meter.
- \$\$ Pick up a friend's lunch check.
- \$\$\$ Give a generous charitable donation.

## GRATITUDE

Grateful people reported feeling 25 percent more happiness and energy and 20 percent less envy and resentment in several recent studies at the University of California. They also slept 10 percent longer each night and exercised 33 percent more if they wrote down what they felt thankful for. "Gratitude," Lyubomirsky says, "is an antidote to negative emotions."

- \$ Send a thank-you card.
- \$\$ Buy a leather-bound gratitude journal.
- \$\$\$ Give a thank-you bottle of Merlot.

## COMPANIONSHIP

Any activity you do with a friend, whether it's grabbing lunch or running errands, will make you happier because you're strengthening the bond of your friendship. "People with stronger and bigger social networks are happier," Lyubomirsky says. "The pleasure you get in the moment of an activity increases when you're with someone who similarly values the experience."

- \$ Sip coffee with a coworker.
- \$\$ Spend a day at the spa with a friend.
- \$\$\$ Take a family vacation.

## EXPERIENCE

People who spend money on experiences like sporting events and concerts rate themselves as feeling happier than when they purchased material things like clothes and cars, according to a 2009 study by San Francisco State University. "The happiness you feel from buying something like a new car wears off after a little while, and then you're looking for the next best thing," Lyubomirsky says. "Experiences can provide happiness through memories. They're renewable, so you're less likely to adapt to them."

- \$ Go to the movies.
- \$\$ See your favorite band perform live.
- \$\$\$ Splurge on a week-long, all-inclusive resort vacation.

## WELL-BEING

Exercise not only releases feel-good endorphins while you're working out, but it keeps your good mood going for the next 12 hours, according to a 2009 study at the University of Vermont. "Any activity you're doing to improve yourself physically increases happiness levels," Lyubomirsky says. "This includes your mental well-being, so meditation and relaxation can do the trick."

- \$ Take a yoga class.
- \$\$ Get a personal trainer.
- \$\$\$ Invest in a home gym.