

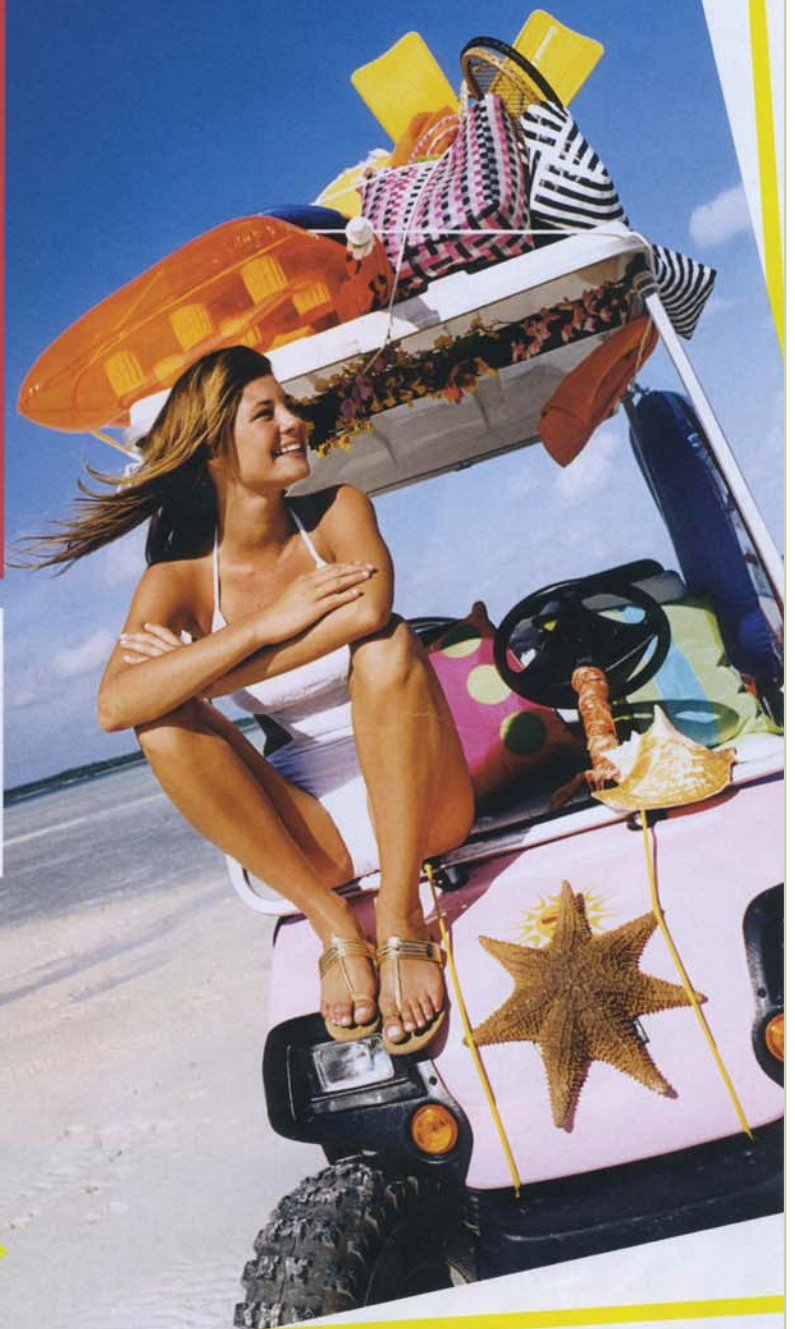
GET HAPPY IN 28 DAYS

The science of happiness is big business with experts insisting they have new ways to make you feel good. In search of her long-lost smile, Annie Blinkhorn tries them out

Life has been rubbish recently. I lost my job, turned 30 and broke up with my boyfriend in the space of a few months.

Can a 'happiness expert' help? Much of the leading new happiness research is, unsurprisingly, from America. This is, after all, the homeland of Krispy Kreme doughnuts, so they know what they're talking about when it comes to bliss.

I decide that I've nothing to lose and put some of the boffins' key theories to the test over a month. Can I banish the blues and be nauseatingly gleeful, just with the appliance of science?



WEEK ONE: GET CONNECTED

Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist at Princeton University and Nobel Prize winner, conducted a survey on 909 American working women and the activities which brought them the most satisfaction were sex, relaxing with friends and lunching with colleagues.

Nick, my boyfriend of almost four years, and I split at the start of the year. As well as the trauma of the break-up, I'm grieving over the loss of a community.

This was a relationship not just with him, but with a whole village. He lives in an idyll on Dartmoor and I made many friends there.

People with depression often suffer from feelings of isolation. So, to feel connected again, I make good my promise of staying in touch. I meet many of my friends in the village at the local pub. They all give me a big hug and tell me I'm sorely missed. Shirley, the blacksmith's wife, goes so far as to say, 'We need you back here to bring us a bit of glamour.' This is more like it. Or am I confusing happiness with having my ego massaged? Sod it, it's working.

I am content in the knowledge that I *do* still have friends there and when the following week I receive a wedding invitation from a couple in the village, I know that they were genuine.

On the strength of this, I contact my ex-flatmate from college for a catch-up. She's stayed close to many of our university friends and invites me to a party where I'll have the opportunity to reacquaint myself with the alumni.

I have a brilliant time. Although everyone looks older (do I?), they also seem a lot more well-adjusted and *pleasant* than their undergraduate selves. I hope I do, too. I've grown as a person since those days and think, with a smile, that I *wouldn't* give anything to be 18 again.

The icing on the happiness cake is that I wake up with the still-cute bloke I had a huge crush on for pretty much the whole of my degree.

HAPPINESS RATING 😊😊😊

HAPPILY EVER AFTER
Four weeks and four routes to happiness, from having fun with friends to seeking out new adventures

WEEK TWO: ACUPUNCTURE

Richard Davidson, professor of psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, measured the prefrontal lobe activity of Buddhist monks in deep meditation and established a possible link between brain activity and the feeling of bliss.

I'm in search of Nirvana, but I'm not sure one week will suffice – it can take a Buddhist monk a lifetime to find it. A friend insists that her acupuncturist, Gerad Kite, will be able to help.

Gerad treats conditions ranging from depression to infertility at his Harley Street clinic. His method is based on the 'five elements' (water, wood, fire, earth, metal) which 'relate to five emotions in humans'. With my pulse, voice and er, smell, Gerad concludes that I'm 'metal' – the sign of instinct and grief and the

'sound' of weeping. Am I predisposed to unhappiness? Gerad assures me this is not the case as long as I am 'balanced'. His aim is not a quick-fix happiness, but to achieve this balance, 'where you'll be at your optimum functioning level as a human being, and therefore far more receptive to long-term contentment'.

He has a point. I've neglected many things since I fell headlong in lust with former crush boy who I've been texting and e-flirting with like a lovesick teen.

Acupuncture is strange rather than painful. A needle goes in my arm but produces an ache in my shoulder. A pin in my back corresponding to the liver throbs and the skin around it glows red.

The result is that I feel calmer. I also enjoy a full night's sleep, which I've not had for ages, and this contributes to the next day's sense of physical well-being. A few sessions later, Gerad feels that

'The aim isn't quick-fix happiness, but to achieve the kind of balance where you're far more receptive to long-term contentment'

I'm ready for Welcome Fragrance, which involves needles above my upper lip. I flinch every time a pin approaches my nostril, but at the end I feel my lungs fill up, as if I've taken a hit of pure oxygen.

'It's not called Welcome Fragrance for nothing,' says Gerad. 'It's when your nose is ready to come out of the shit.' What he means, I think, is that I'm over the worst of job loss, relationship break-up and general mental ill-health and ready to embrace the world – be happy. ▶

HAPPINESS RATING 😊😊😊😊