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Can money buy happiness? At least it will buy me a new heat pump

Wednesday, January 16, 2013

While sitting in my cold house yesterday, I read the SP article "Can Money Buy Happiness"?

www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness_articles.asp?id=1776

It's strange how SP often emails me a link to something I really need to read.

The answer is "it depends" and the comments seem to support this.

I wonder:

- What if I were unable to pay for a new heating system?
- What if I were unable to pay my electric bill?
- What if I were homeless and cold all the time?

With that kind of stress I would find it very hard to be happy.

Yesterday I wrote that I had responded to my temporary stress and sad reflective mood by consuming lots of comfort food. (Easily accessible since I live with the junk food king).

If I lived with constant financial stress, I would find it hard to live a healthy life also.

Statistics say that obesity rates are highest in areas with the lowest average income levels. Part of the problem is cost and accessibility of healthy food options. Constant stress plays a part as well. Oatmeal, potatoes and some other staples are comparatively inexpensive, but fresh fruit and vegetables are another matter. Occasionally we read about families who are able to defy the odds, but it's not the norm.

If you can't provide for your children the way you wish, it takes a very strong person to resist their request for a cheap candy bar or bag of chips. The recent "Weight of a Nation" documentary visited low income areas and compared the cost of junk vs. healthy food.

My comment on the SP article was:

"I think the key is "once basic needs are met." After a certain point, more money doesn't add to happiness, but it's very hard to be happy when hungry or homeless or without the ability to pay for medical treatment"

It's hard to be healthy also.

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WILSONWR

You're so right. The people who need to work on their health the most are often the ones who can least afford to do so. The stress levels of just living from day to day add to the difficulties.
3067 days ago



MOOSLADY

I would say no, money can't buy happiness. My parents are an example. My dad worked as an engineer/chemist and made a decent living. My family lived as if we were much poorer than we were because my parents were determined to save up enough money to feel secure. Fruit, fresh vegetables, meat not on sale, drinks away from home, were all "wasteful" because money was to save, not use. When my childless aunt died they inherited her large savings and stocks. Still they lived as if they were on the edge of poverty. Never new clothes, cheapest food possible, sleeping in the car in rest areas when traveling. Now they are going on 89, their health and energy isn't what it used to be, but they still buy the cheapest canned food(never junk food, too self-indulgent) and worry they are going broke. Just taking care of their investments takes a couple hours per day. Sure, they can pay their medical bills, and replace their heating system but don't, unless they can do it without touching savings. They still balk at eating any fresh food as they believe it is too expensive. They demand that family do all their home maintenance and home health for free rather than pay someone. They consider it too expensive. To put some perspective on them, they live on around \$88,000 per year, around 2/3 of that interest income and live in a rural area with very low cost of living. They worry and stress constantly that they are too poor. They have all their basic needs met and still are in a constant misery about money. Thus, I cannot even agree that meeting basic needs plus, will make you happy.
My husband and I on the other hand, make a little over half what they do, could never hope to replace our heat if it died, often choose to go without medical care and just hope we or the kids get better, drive 20+ year old cars that need repair constantly and run out of food money regularly. That said, even though we stress sometimes, we are generally happier with our life and find more meaning and satisfaction with life then my parents do. I am doing exactly what I have wanted to do, raising my kids and teaching, are surrounded by a large loving family of 5 kids and 3 grandkids, are constantly occupied with an active church community, in good health and eating healthy in spite of a limited budget. I tell my kids that money is like grease, it can smooth out life but will never make you happy.
3070 days ago



CAROLCRC

Interesting discussions! I'm always shocked at the requests at our annual "adopt-a-poor-family" drive at work - they always need size XXL or larger, even for the kids. You can eat nutritiously on little money, but it takes dedication and knowledge to do so.

Once your basic needs are covered, I think it's more a matter of what you decide to do with your life than how much money you have that makes you happy.

That said, I'm certainly enjoying having enough spare cash for nice vacations! 😊
3070 days ago



MJZHERE

What is interesting is what people consider necessities. Trying to help people "struggling" with finances, I run into common roadblocks - cable, internet, cell phones along with the service are non-negotiable, seen as necessities. Also there are ways to get healthy foods cheaper than junk foods in the city - pricematch at Walmart.
I am not without compassion - help the homeless- but I am always amazed at what people think they have to have, and will allow themselves to end up homeless rather than do without some things and save for a "rainy day."
3070 days ago



DR1939

I taught Health Psychology at the university level for many years, also Social Psychology. Both of these areas address the issue of money and happiness. The research clearly shows that not having enough money for basic needs and to meet emergency expenses, particularly along with not having social support to aid you, interferes with happiness. You are correct, once basic needs are met, then it depends. As with most things in life, the equation is not as simple as money = happiness, but rather a very complex set of issues.
3071 days ago



SOUTH_FORK

Thanks for bringing this up- such a complex issue. For those who are living above that "able to provide for basic needs" baseline, the question of "enough" is so crucial. When do we have enough?

People make fun of me because I'll not purchase something I want- even for a few dollars- simply because I don't need it. I know that the minutes of enjoyment it brings won't make me happy.

As a family, we've had to defer medical testing because it was simply too expensive. Although this is upper tier "basic needs" its a painful choice to make.



At any rate, the idea of money=choice is a powerful one.
3071 days ago



SUZYMOBILE

Not having the time to cook healthy is a factor, too. I ate my first frozen meal in YEARS over the weekend! At least it was Lean Cuisine and did no permanent damage.
3071 days ago



SPEEDYDOG

Great blog. I am glad you have a new heater. There is always a question on what is enough money. I live comparatively well. But I consider that luck.

You are correct that many healthy food options are expensive.

Bruce

3071 days ago



COCK-ROBIN

I agree. And it frustrates me that healthy food is more expensive than junk. And it should be the other way around.
3071 days ago



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OPTIMIST1948

Money doesn't buy happiness. It buys CHOICES. And then you can choose the decision to increase your happiness. In this case being warm increases your happiness. You can also redefine how to increase your happiness. Sweet candybar or sweet fruit. Icecream or greek yogurt. Chips or popcorn. Lood guck!
3071 days ago



CELIAMINER

Very though-provoking blog, and I'm glad you are getting your new heating system.

Beyond food, I think I've used the *things* money buys as a substitute for happiness. Both DH and I grew up in lower-income households. While we were not below the poverty level, the gap between our house and more affluent ones was painfully apparent, as my clothes came from others' cast-offs, and we couldn't afford all the neat things my friends had. When I got out on my own, I started buying *things* like there was no tomorrow. Not in a hoarder sense, but the things piled up. When DH and I combined households, the result was bulging closets and a maze of boxes in the basement. As we look toward retirement, it feels as if we will never stop being owned by possessions we haven't even looked at in over a decade, but we WILL get there.
3071 days ago



WATERMELLEN

Very true . . . it's easier to stick with sensible eating when not under stress financially or otherwise . . . and junk food is so cheap that the temptation is tough to resist.
3071 days ago



NELLJONES

I guess I remember the old days when we were shown photos of poor families in Appalachia. No one was fat. My parents grew up during the Depression, and I knew many people that age who were hungry as kids, some who were excited to join the Army because they would finally have enough to eat. My how things have changed!
3071 days ago



SYNCHRODAD

Having money does not bring happiness, having lots does not necessarily bring happiness. I think John Bogle is happy. Here is a pointer to an commencement address he gave in 2007 just before our country's financial implosion. Happiness most likely has the greatest opportunity with "enough."
http://johncbogle.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/Georgetown_2007.pdf
3071 days ago



MISCHAKEO

I work with low income students. They start off thin and by 3rd-5th over half of them are overweight. They live on junk food. It does not help that our school offers pizza daily. I agree with you..it is hard to keep thin and be poor. Those stats are right. Quite honestly we do spend money on getting good healthy food.

Great blog and interesting thoughts.
3071 days ago





CD6145574

money can buy happiness. try doing anything without money. if your short a penny most stores will not sell you the item
3071 days ago



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