

WANT TO FEEL HAPPY?

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING NEW!

We all like life to be safe and predictable in our comfort zone, but it turns out that we can be much happier when we get out there and explore!

A new study conducted by scientists from New York University and the University of Miami and published in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*, found that new and diverse experiences appear to be linked to enhanced happiness.

“Our results suggest that people feel happier when they have more variety in their daily routines—when they go to novel places and have a wider array of experiences,” explains Catherine Hartley, an assistant professor in New York University’s Department of Psychology and one of the paper’s co-authors and cited by an NYU press release. “The opposite

is also likely true: positive feelings may drive people to seek out these rewarding experiences more frequently.”

During the research, scientists tracked participants in New York and Miami via GPS and asked them to report their emotional state via text messages during the three to four months of the study. The results showed that on days when subjects visited more locations they were more likely to describe their emotional state of mind as positive, including happy, excited, strong, relaxed and attentive.

Additionally, researchers wanted to find out if there is a physical proof of

the findings so they asked about half of the participants to come in for an MRI. The results showed a direct link between the strong positive feelings that some of the people reported and brain activity in the areas of the brain associated with the processing of new experiences and reward.

“These results suggest a reciprocal link between the novel and diverse experiences we have during our daily exploration of our physical environments and our subjective sense of well-being,” says Hartley, who also has appointments at NYU’s Center for Neural Science and NYU Langone Health Neuroscience Institute.

So, with the pandemic still in full swing around the world, and the inability to travel much, yet, are we doomed to feel unhappy? Apparently, not at all. According

to the NYU press releases, announcing the publishing of the findings, the scientists suggested that even small movements might deliver an effect similar to traveling far and wide.

According to the release, “the researchers, who conducted the study prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, recognize that current public-health guidelines and restrictions pose limits on movement. However, they note that even small changes that introduce greater variability into the physical or mental routine—such as exercising at home, going on a walk around the block, and taking a different route to the grocery store or pharmacy—may potentially yield similar beneficial effects,” s stated in the release. ■

