

The happy factor!

As the government measures our national wellbeing, we ask five readers to reveal their formulas for happiness

It's easy to lose sight of what brings us joy when we're busy juggling the demands of family, work and daily life. Now happiness is high on the political agenda as the government compiles a wellbeing index to gauge the state of the nation's mood.

So what is the secret to happiness? 'What makes us happy isn't always as straightforward as you'd think,' says Jessica Chivers, psychologist and author of *Mothers Work!* (Hay House, £10.99) 'For example, people often think money will make them happy, but research shows that once you reach a certain threshold, anything above that doesn't make you any happier.'

Professor Lord Richard Layard, a member of the Measuring National Well-Being Advisory Forum, identifies seven of the most influential factors on our wellbeing as: **family relationships, financial situation, work, community and friends, health, personal freedom and personal values.** While a recent Gallup World Poll of more than 60,000 people in 155 countries found that 'inherently social' factors, such as being with family and friends, make people happy.

'Happiness can actually refer to a fleeting moment of joy, for example relaxing with a glass of wine after work,' says Jessica. But what she believes we should be striving for is a long-lasting state of happiness. 'That's why it's more accurate to call it wellbeing. True happiness is when you feel connected to the world and to people – when you have a sense of community.'

While it's unrealistic to feel Pollyanna-esque happiness all the time, Jessica says: 'What we're all aiming for is to be able to take a snapshot of our lives at any time and think: "For the most part, my life is good".'

The health benefits of finding contentment could be immense too, with evidence suggesting that happy people live longer. In one American study, the difference was nine years between the happiest group and the unhappiest group. So how do we give ourselves the best chance of nurturing our wellbeing and longevity?



FROM LEFT: Sarah Taylor, Teresa Coles, Alison Clarke, Sue Sewell, Liz Allison and Betty Hutley

'My friends are the threads running through my life'

Sue Sewell, 50, a social worker, lives in Windsor, Berkshire, with her husband John, 50, a quality manager. They have four children, Jackie, 25, David, 23, Tom, 20, and Dan, seven

I celebrated my 50th birthday with afternoon tea at The Ritz with friends I've made from different stages of my life: Alison and Teresa, who I've known since we were all three years old; Liz, who I trained with to become a social worker; and Betty and Sarah, who I met through my youngest son, Dan. Ranging in age from their twenties to their seventies, all my friends bring something different into my life.

My younger colleagues at work keep me (vaguely!) up to speed on music and fashion, while they ask for my advice about work or relationships. Likewise, I have the benefit of my older friends' life experiences. Having Dan in my forties opened up a new world

for me, and a lovely circle of friends I may never have met otherwise.

As well as my childhood friends and workmates, I've become close to my neighbours. I love the sense of community – helping out with each others' children and crowding into someone's house on Saturday nights when Strictly Come Dancing is on.

Once a month, I make time to have dinner with friends and we have days out, such as our annual outing to Ascot for Ladies' Day.

There's nothing like female friendship for warmth and empathy. They know all about my life, give me emotional support and make me laugh until I cry. My friends are the threads running through my life and I can't imagine being without them.'



'The joy and happiness of being a grandmother is wonderful.'

Joanna Lumley



'My happiness is with my children. They appreciate everything and expect nothing.'

Carol Vorderman



'If I'm outside, I'm really happy. I don't care whether it's blowing a gale, I just love being outdoors.'

Caroline Quentin



'Happiness for me is when my kids are good and my family is whole. My happiness is measured against theirs – when they're in a good place, I feel really good.'

Michelle Obama



'Working again gives me fulfilment'

Michele Porter, 38, is a part-time jewellery consultant for www.jomagdalena.net. She lives in Fetcham, Surrey, with husband Michael, 38, an accountant, and their children, George, six, Oliver, four, and Zoe, two

Before having children, I worked as a human resources manager and was very ambitious. My career was my top priority and how I judged my success. After I had George, I went back part-time, but found myself working all hours at home trying to get things done.

When I became pregnant again, I took voluntary redundancy as I knew working wouldn't be worth it once I'd paid for two lots of childcare, so I found an evening job in an office processing insurance policies four nights a week. I dropped the children off at my childminder at 4pm and my husband Michael would rush home after work to pick them up, feed, bath them and put them to bed. It was stressful and I felt dreadfully torn because I wanted to be with my children, but I also wanted a job that fitted into family life.

Then a few years ago, I went to a neighbour's Jo Magdalena jewellery party and got chatting to the consultant. I decided to become one myself and arrange parties in the evenings and around my family commitments. It's not the sort of full-time salary I was used to before, but it pays for the childrens' clothes, groceries, some bills – and my shoe habit.

Motherhood has made me a different person, but working gives me fulfilment, financial independence and a life outside my home. I can honestly say it's the best job I've ever had because it gives me part of the "old me" back.'