

FAMILY CIRCLE

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happiness SECRET

CONTENTMENT IS EASY TO FIND—IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK. **BY MARISA COHEN**

Do you want to know the secret to joy—a sense of well-being and fulfillment that is easily within reach right now? It's not hidden in mystic teachings that take years of study, and it doesn't involve newfangled pharmaceuticals or endless navel-gazing. It's right there—in the snow-dusted trees in your backyard; in the kitchen before dinner, the room redolent of roasting chicken as your son recalls his soccer game; in the quiet times with your husband on the sofa watching TV together after the children have gone to bed.

Such perfect moments—those fleeting periods when we experience feelings of contentment that transcend our ordinary surroundings—are available to us all, every day. But more often than not, we don't notice them because we're too busy looking the other way, pursuing happiness by chasing a specific goal (job promotion, bigger house) or a stress-free state of nirvana. But both are dead-end roads when it comes

to nurturing the spirit. "Happy people don't lock onto specific goals, such as losing 10 pounds in three months," says Greg Hicks, coauthor of *How We Choose to Be Happy* (Perigee). "They look for options and possibilities that help them reach their goals." And as for feeling great all the time—well, get real. "A full life is complex and filled with situations that bring about anger, sadness and frustration as well as joy," says Dana Lightman, Ph.D., a psychotherapist in Philadelphia and author of *POWER Optimism: Enjoy the Life You Have...Create the Success You Want* (Power Optimism). "Happiness isn't a continuous state. It comes in moments, and it's the contrast between the ups and downs that makes the good times stand out."

So how exactly can we seize the day—and all the delights each one offers? Certainly not by living each one as if it's our last. "If you never thought about the future and just ate cake and spent all your money recklessly, you'd end up overweight and broke," says M. J. Ryan, a San Francisco-based life coach and author of *The Happiness Makeover* (Broadway). Instead, make a practice of slowing down and taking the time to recognize and appreciate the small joys around you, says Lightman, and "you'll create a more positive perspective that helps in all aspects of your life." Follow these easy steps, and soon you'll have less stress, more energy and renewed optimism. Satisfaction guaranteed.