BBC LEARNING ENGLISH
6 Minute English
Is happiness genetic?

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Dan
Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English– the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six new items of vocabulary. I'm Dan…

Neil
And I'm Neil. In this episode we'll be discussing if happiness is genetic

Dan
How happy would you say you are Neil?

Neil
I'm pretty happy I think. Why do you ask?

Dan
Well, in March this year the UN published its fifth world happiness report.

Neil
Is that the one that ranks all of the countries based on how happy they are?

Dan
You've heard of it then. Over all there are 155 countries included, and Norway came top of them all, overtaking Denmark, which was the leader for the years 2012 to 2016.

Neil
Well what about the UK?

Dan
Ah, well that's this week's questions, isn't it? Where did the UK place?

a) in the top 10
b) between 11th and 20th
c) after 21st

Neil

Well, I'm going to say c) after 21st

Dan

Ok, you know the drill. No answers until the end of the show.

Neil

So, Norway, eh? And Denmark the previous year? They're neighbours!

Dan

Yes. In fact, for the last 5 years, the results have been pretty much the same. Nordic countries tend to **dominate** the top of the table.

Neil

Dominate meaning 'control'. Ok, well how are the results decided?

Dan

It's very simple. They ask 1000 people in each country a single **subjective** question.

Neil

Subjective means 'based on personal experience, beliefs or feelings'. …Well, what's the question?

Dan

Imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?

Neil

That's actually quite simple.

Dan

Yep. The Nordic countries all score an average close to 7.5 out of 10.

Neil

So we have a number of neighbouring countries which all claim to be extremely happy. There must be a connection….is it the weather?

Dan

Well, that's a logical conclusion, but there is another idea. I'll let Professor Andrew Oswald from the University of Warwick explain.

INSERT
Professor Andrew Oswald, University of Warwick
We think that there is a genetic **component**, in part, to why the Danes do so well coming so regularly at the head of happiness international league tables. It does appear from the data that the Danes have the smallest amount of the, you might say, dangerous, short kind of genetic pattern. So they may have a kind of **inoculation** against the possibility of depression.

Neil
So, professor Oswald mentioned there is a genetic **component,** or part, to Danish DNA which gives them an **inoculation**, or illness protection, against depression and sadness.

Dan
Yep. All of the Nordic countries have a similar make-up.

Neil
But he said 'in part'. That means it doesn't explain everything. So, there's something missing.

Dan
There's no fooling you! Michael Booth has written a book about Nordic happiness. He has another theory.

INSERT
Michael Booth, Author
There are so many reasons why the Danes are happy, why they're **content** that have nothing to do with DNA. Of course they're happy! They're rich! They're sexy! They're funny! They don't work that much!

Neil
Ah. So being rich, funny, sexy and not working much is why they are **content**, meaning 'satisfied'. That sounds a bit like you, Dan.

Dan
I can't publicly comment on that Neil, I'm sorry! But there is one more piece we're missing. Hygge. It's a loanword and only just appeared in the British dictionaries. We don't have a direct translation, but it basically means **cosiness**.

Neil
Cosiness, 'meaning warm, comfortable and safe'.

Dan
Yes. Danes love simple comforts. A warm **cosy** room, some drinks, some candles and a fire, and they are happy. Maybe that's the secret.

Neil

Well, the secret to my happiness right now is finding out if I was right in the quiz.

Dan

Oh yes! I asked: Where did the UK place in the World Happiness Report 2017
a) in the top 10
b) between 11th and 20th
c) after 21st

Neil

I said c) after 21st

Dan

And I'm afraid you're wrong my friend. We placed b) between 11th and 20th. We were actually 19th.

Neil

Well, let's make our listeners happy by going through the vocabulary.

Dan

Ok. First we had **dominate**. If you **dominate** something or someone, you control it. It's quite an aggressive word. You wouldn't use it for people much. But, give us an example, Neil.

Neil

You can talk about a team **dominating** play in a sport. Next we had **subjective**. If something is **subjective** it is based on personal experience, beliefs or feelings rather than facts, which are objective. What type of things are **subjective**, Dan?

Dan

Oh, it's our opinions of art, music, jokes, food. You know, I like sausages and ice-cream but no one else does!

Neil

That's because it's disgusting!

Dan

Then we had **component**. A **component** is part of something that makes up a larger whole. Televisions and computers have many **components** in them.

Neil

And a person can be an essential **component** in a team, like a goal-keeper in football. After that was **inoculation**. An **inoculation** is a form of disease protection. It is a synonym of….Dan?

Dan

Vaccination. I went on holiday last year and had to have my **inoculations** updated. Then we had **content**. If you are **content**, you are satisfied and want nothing. What makes you content, Neil?

Neil

A warm sunny day in my garden with a good book. And finally we had **cosiness**. **Cosiness** comes from **cosy**, which means 'warm, comfortable and safe'. Where's **cosy** for you Dan?

Dan

Oh easy. On a freezing cold day, it's tucked up in bed with a nice cup of tea. And that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Neil

And we are on social media too, of course - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. See you there.

Both

Bye!