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# Secrets of HAPPINESS

BY WOMEN WHO FINALLY GOT IT RIGHT



# My HAPPY age

Cool, calm and a lot more confident: as a new survey claims that women feel their most content at 35\*, four writers reveal why their 'happy age' is right now

the only bad thing about turning 50 is, well, turning 50. When the sun comes up the morning after and shines on your sixth decade, the horizon is utterly brighter and full of promise. And here I am, at 51, certain that this is the best year yet. Sixty is still too far off to dread.

Thinking back, when I turned 17, I had no idea who I was or would become, and it seemed that each day another cataclysmic decision loomed. My twenties were spent falling in and out of love, and toiling 70 hours a week in a newsroom. My thirties passed in a blur because whatever identity I had was given over to raising my children.

My forties were the worst. My youth began to fade in a slo-mo tragedy, featuring grey hair and wrinkles. I neglected my marriage, friendships and ambition. At 47, I had an epic midlife crisis. I became obsessed with my disappointments – financial, emotional and others – and what I felt I was losing, as if the future held only blackness. My 50th birthday felt like an oncoming bullet train, so I decided not to celebrate. I took a solo trip to Russia, to relive a voyage I had made frequently in my twenties. All I could do was wallow in my memories.

But at 50, the great weight lifted. Then, I turned 51. I'm not sure if the years have offered me wisdom but, like every adult, I've been through the mill. That's just what happens in a life spent raising children, working for a living, facing every kind of responsibility, experiencing elation, despair and mostly, everything in between. 'Happiness' as a state of being is not

something I strive for, or even believe in, but if you contend, as I do, that life is full of happy moments, then 51 is the age where you can finally see and appreciate them.

I welcomed the onset of courage. Now it's easier to say "no" when the impossible is asked of me, and I no longer care if someone gets mad about it, or if they like me, hate me, love my writing or think I'm a fake. I know my good qualities, and understand my faults even better. When I experience personal or professional rejection, I brush off my boots and soldier on. There is no time for whining, only the urgency of maximising these still-fruitful years. I'm fortunate that I have a strong marriage, and my kids have grown into fascinating, accomplished people. For now, I'm healthy and I appreciate that fact, as well as my good luck to be born in a place and time where living to 51 is even possible. ●

# 51

## "Passing a milestone"

By Marcia DeSanctis



One evening in May, my friend and I sat in one of Manhattan's plush bars sipping prohibitively expensive cocktails. It was her 47th birthday and, while I set out to toast her endeavours and good health, the occasion turned a little soggy. "I'm almost 50," she said through the downpour of tears. She spat out the last word as if a hornet had just landed in her mouth. I felt for her. My 47th birthday was also the pits. I was tossing about on a sea of erratic hormones and midlife regret, convinced that the impending milestone meant the beginning of the slide into decrepitude (and death). But my consolation to her lay in a prediction from my own experience: her fear would, ironically, end at her 50th birthday. In fact, now that it's behind me, I can say that