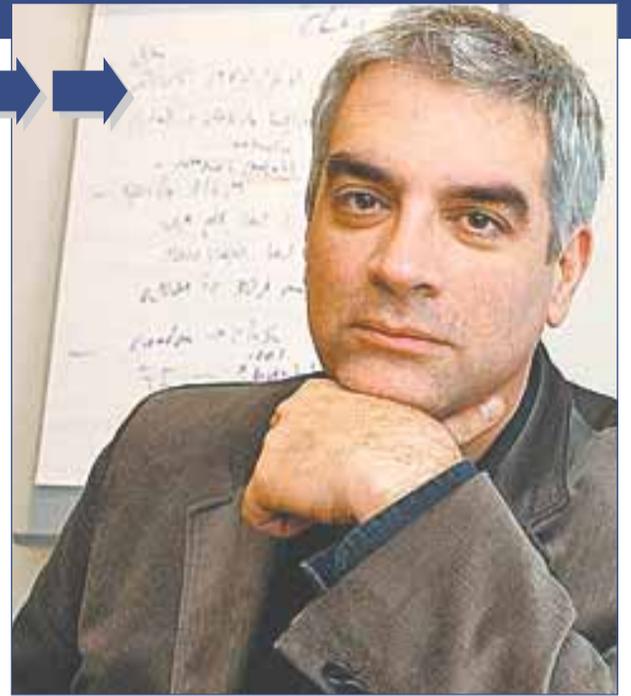


Nicholas Christakis, a Greek American physician and professor at Harvard is in the list of the 100 most influential people of TIME magazine for 2009. Christakis' new study suggests that happiness is contagious. "Using data from a study that tracked about 5,000 people over 20 years, he suggests that happiness, like the flu, can spread from person to person. When people who are close to us, both in terms of social ties (friends or relatives) and physical proximity, become happier, we do too", reports TIME. On the other hand Christakis also says that somebody can also get "bad" behaviors from his peers such as smoking and obesity.

# Nicholas Christakis is The Most Influential Greek American of 2009



*Social scientists used to have a straightforward, if tongue-in-cheek, answer to the question of how to become happy: Surround yourself with people who are uglier, poorer and shorter than you are – and who are unhappily married and have annoying kids. You will compare yourself with these people, and the contrast will cheer you up.*

Nicholas Christakis, 47, a physician and sociologist at Harvard University, challenges this idea. Using data from a study that tracked about 5,000 people over 20 years, he suggests that happiness, like the flu, can spread from person to person. When people who are close to us, both in terms of social ties (friends or relatives) and physical proximity, become happier, we do too. For example, when a person who lives within a



mile of a good friend becomes happier, the probability that this person's good friend will also become happier increases 15%. More surprising is that the effect can transcend direct links and reach a third degree of separation: when a friend of a friend becomes happier, we become happier, even when we don't know that third person directly.

This means that surrounding ourselves with happier people will make us happier, make the people close to us happier – and make the people close to them happier. But social networks don't transmit only the good things in life.

Christakis found that smoking and obesity can be socially infectious too. If his thesis proves out, then the saying that you can judge a person by his or her friends might carry more weight than we thought.

Ariely is the James B. Duke professor of behavioral science at Duke University and the author of the best seller Predictably Irrational

**Fast Fact:** Smokers have been pushed from the center of their social webs, Christakis found.

**BIO**

Nicholas A. Christakis, MD, PhD, MPH, is an internist and social scientist who conducts research on social factors that affect health, health care, and longevity. He is a Professor of Medical Sociology in the Department of Health Care Policy at Harvard Medical School; Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology in the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences; and an Attending Physician (with an emphasis on palliative medicine) in the Department of Medicine at the Mt. Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As of July, 2009, he will be the Master of Pforzheimer House in Harvard College.

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