How to Make Yourself Happier During a Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded around the world, people have reported negative effects on their mental health, psychological functioning, and on their day-to-day lives. For instance, individuals are sleeping less, consuming more alcohol or other drugs/substances, having trouble concentrating, worrying about impacts on their finances, and having more fights with their partner or loved ones, a 2020 poll shows.

The stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic led a group of researchers to examine how negative emotions could be reduced and how positive emotions could be increased. The researchers involved in the study are part of a large cross-cultural collaborative network called the Psychological Science Accelerator. The study published this week focused on examining an emotion regulation strategy called reappraisal, which involves changing how a person thinks about a situation with the goal of influencing their emotional response. More specifically, the study examined two forms of reappraisal: rethinking and refocusing.

In the rethinking condition, participants were told that "This strategy involves changing one's thinking in order to change one's emotions. This strategy is based on the insight that different ways of interpreting or thinking about any situation can lead to different emotions. This means that finding new ways of thinking about a situation can change how you feel about the situation. For example, consider someone who stays at home under lockdown due to COVID-19 and is feeling anxious, sad, or angry. In this case, rethinking might involve realizing that the situation is only temporary because dedicated people across the world are working hard to find a vaccine."

Participants were then given examples of how rethinking might be used during the pandemic. For instance, "I know from world history that keeping calm and carrying on gets us through tough times."

In the refocusing condition, participants were told that "This strategy involves changing one's thinking in order to change one's emotions. This strategy is based on the insight that finding something good in even the most challenging situations can lead to different emotional responses. This means that refocusing on whatever good aspects may be found in a situation can change how you feel about the situation. For example, consider someone who stays at home under lockdown due to COVID-19 and is feeling anxious, sad, or angry. In this case, refocusing might involve realizing that staying at home gives them time to do things that they may not have been able to do before, like reading, painting, and spending time with family."

Participants were then given examples of how refocusing might be used during the pandemic. For instance, "This situation is helping us realize the importance of meaningful

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social connections, and helping us understand who the most important people in our lives are."

Participants were exposed to a reappraisal intervention (rethinking or refocusing) or two control conditions. They were then asked about their emotions towards several aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. 27,989 participants from 87 regions around the world completed the study.

The researchers found that both reappraisal interventions (versus both control conditions) decreased negative emotional responses and increased positive emotional responses. We also found that the two forms of reappraisal were similarly effective.

In conclusion, reappraisal can increase psychological resilience and lessen the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, next time you want to feel happier during these difficult times, try rethinking or refocusing. Here's one last example of reappraisal used in the study: "In the past, people have overcome many challenges that seemed overwhelming at the time, and we will overcome COVID-19-related challenges too."

Match the words with their meanings.

1. to unfold	( )	12. to involve	( )
2. day-to-day	( )	13. control conditions	( )
3. poll	( )	14. to overcome	( )
4. cross-cultural	( )	15. overwhelming	( )
5. collaborative	( )		
6. reappraisal	( )		
7. insight	( )		
8. lockdown	( )		
9. vaccine	( )		
10. pandemic	( )		

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a. a situation in which people are not allowed to freely enter, leave or move around in a building or area because of danger

b. times of trouble, struggle and unhappiness

c. happening every day as a regular part of something

d. to develop or become clear

e. a clear, deep, and sometimes sudden understanding of a complicated problem or situation, or the ability to have such an understanding

f. referring to two or more different countries and cultures

g. difficult to deal with

h. a special substance that you take into your body to prevent a disease

i. a disease that exists in almost all of an area or in almost all of a group of people, animals or plants

j. a study in which people are asked for their opinions about a subject

k. the process of examining a situation or activity again in order to make changes to it

l. to include someone or something in an activity

m. involving two or more people or organizations working together for a special purpose

n. to defeat or succeed in controlling or dealing with something

o. standards against which other conditions can be compared in a scientific experiment

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Answer key

1.	(d.)	6.	(k.)	11.	(b.)
2.	(c.)	7.	(e.)	12.	(l.)
3.	(j.)	8.	(a.)	13.	(o.)
4.	(f.)	9.	(h.)	14.	(n.)
5.	(m.)	10.	(i.)	15.	(g.)

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