

Distraction from negative feelings linked to improved problem solving

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(Medical Xpress) -- Brooding, or excessive rumination over negative feelings, is known to interfere with important problem-solving abilities, while immediate distraction from those feelings can increase problem-solving capacity, according to new research by a University of Maine Department of Psychology faculty member and a colleague.

In the study, 51 participants watched a short movie clip that was intended to make them feel sad. Afterward, participants who immediately distracted themselves from the [stressor](#) were better able to move on in the pursuit of solutions, compared to the participants who engaged in rumination immediately after watching the clip.

UMaine [psychology professor](#) K. Lira Yoon and Jutta Joorman of the

University of Miami Department of Psychology found it is not the use of specific [emotion regulation](#) strategies, but rather the timing of strategies that is critical to decreasing sad moods and promoting effective [problem solving](#).

Yoon and Joormann published their results in an article, “Is Timing Everything? Sequential Effects of Rumination and Distraction on Interpersonal Problem Solving,” in the June issue of the journal *Cognitive Therapy and Research*.

“Regardless of whether participants further engaged in distraction or rumination, those who responded to the negative mood induction with immediate distraction generated more effective solutions to interpersonal problems compared to participants who responded to the negative mood induction with immediate rumination,” the authors write in the article. “Rumination had no detrimental effects on problem solving (even) if the person initially engaged in distraction. An initial period of distraction, thus, seems to protect individuals from the detrimental effects of rumination on problem solving.”

The findings may provide further insight into the relation between rumination and depression, the authors say. Poor interpersonal problem solving can lead to higher levels of interpersonal stress, which may then increase risk for a depressive episode. Implications for treatments could include not only targeting problem-solving strategies directly — an effective intervention when treating depression — but to also help individuals engage in [distraction](#) in a timely manner.

Provided by University of Maine

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