

Improving memory for specific events can alleviate symptoms of depression

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(Medical Xpress)—Hear the word "party" and memories of your 8th birthday sleepover or the big bash you attended last New Year's may come rushing to mind. But it's exactly these kinds of memories, embedded in a specific place and time, that people with depression have difficulty recalling.

Research has shown that people who suffer from, or are at risk of, depression have difficulty tapping into specific memories from their own past, an impairment that affects their ability to solve problems and leads them to focus on feelings of distress.

In a study forthcoming in *Clinical [Psychological Science](#)*, a new journal of the Association for Psychological Science, psychological scientists Hamid Neshat-Doost of the University of Isfahan, Iran, Laura Jobson of the University of [East Anglia](#), Tim Dalgleish of the Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, Medical Research Council, Cambridge and colleagues investigated whether a particular training program, Memory Specificity Training, might improve people's memory for past events and ameliorate their [symptoms of depression](#).

In Iran, the researchers recruited 23 adolescent Afghani refugees who had lost their fathers in the war in Afghanistan and who showed symptoms of depression. Twelve of the adolescents were randomly assigned to participate in the [memory training](#) program and 11 were randomly assigned to a control group that received no training.

All of the adolescents completed a [memory test](#) in which they saw 18 positive, neutral, and negative words in Persian and were asked to recall a specific memory related to each word. Their responses were categorized as either a specific or a non-specific type of memory. They also completed questionnaires design to measure symptoms of depression and [anxiety symptoms](#).

For five weeks, the adolescents assigned to the training attended a weekly 80-minute group session, in which they learned about different types of memory and memory recall, and practiced recalling specific memories after being given positive, neutral, and negative keywords.

At the end of the five weeks, both the training group and the control group were given the same memory test that they were given at the beginning of the study. And they took the memory test again as part of a follow-up visit two months later.

The adolescents who participated in the training were able to provide more specific memories after the training than those who did not receive intervention. They also showed fewer symptoms of depression than the control group at the two month follow-up. The researchers found that the relationship between participant group (training or control) and their symptoms of depression at follow-up could be accounted for by changes in specific memory recall over time.

These findings are promising because they suggest that a standalone training program that focuses on specific memory recall can actually improve depression symptoms.

Based on the results of this study, Jobson, Dalgleish, and colleagues conclude that, for individuals suffering from depression, "including a brief [training](#) component that targets [memory](#) recall as an adjunct to cognitive behavioral therapy or prior therapy may have beneficial effects

on [memory recall](#) and mood."

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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