

Depressed people have a more accurate perception of time

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People with mild depression underestimate their talents. However, new research led by the University of Hertfordshire shows that depressed people are more accurate when it comes to time estimation than their happier peers.

Depressed people often appear to distort the facts and view their lives more negatively than non-[depressed people](#). Feelings of [helplessness](#), [hopelessness](#) and worthlessness and of being out of control are some of the main [symptoms of depression](#). For these people time seems to pass slowly and they will often use phrases such as "time seems to drag" to describe their experiences and their life. However, depressed people sometimes have a more accurate perception of reality than their happier friends and family who often look at life through rose-tinted glasses and hope for the best.

Professor Diana Kornbrot, Research Professor of Mathematical Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "The results of our study found that depressed people were accurate when estimating time whereas non-depressed peoples' estimations were too high. This may be because mildly-depressed people focus their attention on time and less on external influences, and therefore have clarity of thought – a phenomenon known as 'depressive realism'."

In the study, volunteers gave verbal estimates of the length of different time intervals of between two and sixty-five seconds and they also produced their own time intervals. For non-depressed people, their

verbal [time interval](#) estimations were too high; while their own production of times in the same range were too low. In contrast, the mildly-depressed people were accurate in both their verbal time estimates and also their own production times.

Professor Kornbrot continued: "Our findings may help to shed a little light on how people with depression can be treated. People with depression are often encouraged to check themselves against reality, but maybe this timing skill can help in the treatment of mildly-depressed people. These findings may also link to successful mindfulness based treatments for depression which focus on encouraging present moment awareness."

More information: Msetfi, R., Grimwood, M. and Kornbrot, D. Time perception and depressive realism: Judgement type, psychophysical functions and bias, *PLOS ONE*.
([dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0071585](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0071585))

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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