

# Research shows that time flies when you're counting down

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In a new study, Vicki Morwitz, Harvey Golub Professor of Business Leadership at the NYU Stern School of Business, and alumna Edith Shalev (Stern '10) at the Technion Israel Institute of Technology show that counting down (i.e., 100 to one) while performing a task shortens the perceived duration of the task compared to counting up (i.e., one to 100).

Morwitz and Shalev conducted three studies where participants were asked to use a product (a hand exercise ball or an ergonomic hand grip) or [count](#) geometrical shapes on a computer screen. They found that people hold more favorable attitudes toward a product and a greater intention to buy that product after using the item and counting downward versus upward.

The researchers proposed several applications of this research, such as that people may be more likely to complete physical exercises if instructed to count downward because they feel the task is less taxing. Conversely, people who are stressed or agitated may try counting upward (e.g., counting sheep when you have trouble sleeping) to increase the perception of relaxation.

"These findings offer some insights into how to tackle public health issues like obesity or dental hygiene," explains Morwitz. "Downward counting can shorten time perception and enhance attitudes towards important, yet monotonous, tasks and healthy behaviors such as physical exercise and teeth brushing."

The article, "Does Time Fly When You're Counting Down? The Effect of Counting Direction on Subjective Time Judgment," is forthcoming in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

Provided by New York University

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