

Study investigates the effect of crying on one's mood

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Credit: Peter Griffin/public domain

Yes, a good cry indeed might go a long way to make you feel better, says Asmir Gračanin of the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands, lead author of a study in Springer's journal *Motivation and Emotion*. These

findings were established after a research team videotaped a group of participants while watching the emotionally charged films *La vita è bella* and *Hachi: A Dog's Tale*. Afterwards, the participants were asked a few times to reflect on how they felt.

Although humans are the only species able to shed [emotional tears](#), little is known about the function of crying. While some researchers see it as a cry for support, comfort or help, others believe the main role of crying is to relieve emotions. Different types of studies focusing on the latter, however, provide conflicting results. Retrospective self-report studies support claims that crying provides emotional relief and ultimately influences someone's mood for the better. In contrast, laboratory studies using emotional films often show a consistent decrease in mood immediately after an emotional event.

In an effort to understand these discrepant results, Gračanin's team extended methodology used in previous laboratory studies. They examined both the immediate and the delayed effect of crying on mood within a controlled laboratory setting. The two films shown to 60 participants are known to be tearjerkers. Immediately afterwards, the 28 participants who cried and the 32 who didn't shed a tear were asked how they felt. They also had to rate their moods 20 and 90 minutes later.

As expected, the mood of the non-criers was unchanged and unaffected immediately after seeing the films. The mood of the criers, on the other hand, was distinctively low and even took a dip. Within 20 minutes, however, their mood had returned to the level reported before the screening. Finally, after 90 minutes, the criers reported even a better mood than was the case before the films started. Such a mood shift was not tied to the number of times that a person cried during the films.

According to Gračanin, it's this dip and subsequent return of emotions to previous levels that might make criers feel as if they are in a much better

mood after they have shed some tears.

However, it seems that criers even experience a general mood increase, but only after a longer period of time.

"After the initial deterioration of mood following crying, it takes some time for the mood not only to recover but also to be lifted above the levels at which it had been before the emotional event," he explains. This pattern is often found in retrospective studies where people are asked to rate their [mood](#) levels after having experienced a good cry.

More information: Gračanin, A. et al (2014). Why crying does and sometimes does not seem to alleviate mood: A quasiexperimental study, *Motivation and Emotion*. [DOI: 10.1007/s11031-015-9507-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-015-9507-9)

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