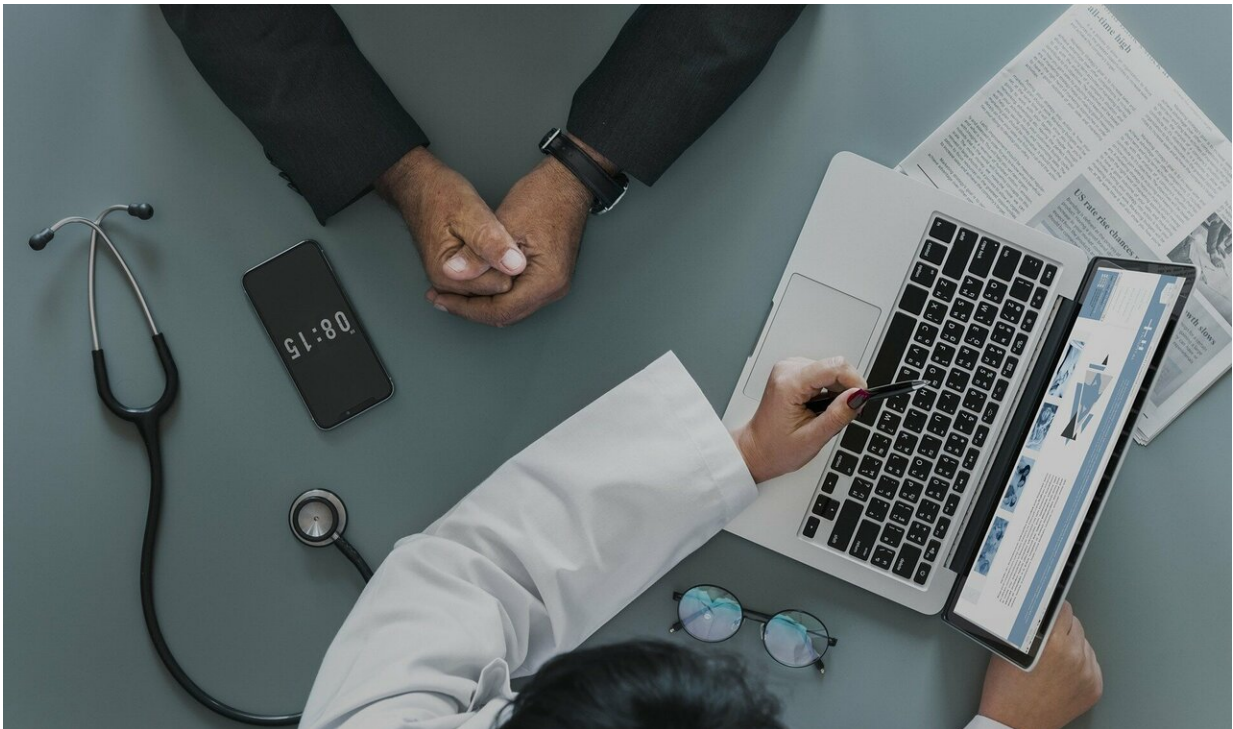


Seeing the doctor? Relax, you'll remember more

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Some patients feel shame, anxiety or fear immediately before seeing their doctor, making them tense. But if they can relax and become calm, patients will likely pay attention to and better comprehend health messages, suggests a new University of Michigan study.

Researchers tested whether increasing one's positive self through meditation can lessen the patient's [negative feelings](#) prior to getting the [health information](#).

"An intense negative emotion can lead to a patient to focus on only one or two pieces of information and gloss over other important details from health messages," said Koji Takahashi, a psychology graduate student and study's lead author.

The findings came from four studies involving nearly 1,450 adults divided in groups. Some meditated or listened to audio that instructed breathing exercises and relaxation. Others simply listened to [historical information](#).

After completing the listening task, all participants read information about flu, cancer, HIV, herpes and gonorrhea.

Participants who relaxed reported paying more attention to the health messages, the study showed. The meditation created a positive, low arousal affect, which enabled them to retain the information, said Allison Earl, assistant professor of psychology and study's co-author.

"A negative affect drives attention away from unpleasant or threatening information," she said.

This doesn't mean you won't be scared or embarrassed in the doctor's office, "but you'll be able to handle the information better by being in a calmer mood," Earl said.

The researchers recommend that people use their time wisely in the [waiting room](#) by meditating or listening to calming music, not simply watching television or playing on their cell phones.

In addition, if patients do not believe they can relax, they might consider taking a family member or friend to the appointment to take notes during the doctor's consultation, Takahashi said.

Researchers noted that this study only focused on adults receiving written [health messages](#); the findings should not be extrapolated beyond this without further research.

More information: Koji J. Takahashi et al. Effect of Extraneous Affect on Health Message Reception, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0146167219855042](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219855042)

Provided by University of Michigan

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