

How to have a better day during the pandemic

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It's entirely reasonable during a pandemic to feel more stressed, anxious, lonely and depressed than usual. Yet, despite the circumstances, some people are doing OK. Some people continue to feel love for others,

gratitude for what they have and joy in the small things.

How do they do that? Data collected in April by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill researchers who asked 600 adults across the United States about their experiences and behavior in the past day reveals ways positive emotions can be cultivated as people spend more time apart.

Exercising, as well as [self-care](#) such as hobbying and relaxing, or spiritual activities like prayer and meditation, come with positive emotions, according to researchers in the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Lab at UNC-Chapel Hill, which led the recent research. Scrolling passively through social media left people feeling down.

"Most people know that these things are important, of course. But they are especially so these days as we stay at home to slow the spread of the coronavirus," said Barbara L. Frederickson, the Kenan Distinguished Professor in the UNC-Chapel Hill Department of Psychology and Neuroscience and director of the PEP lab.

"The tie between time spent on these sorts of activities and positive states was particularly strong for people who felt more of the negatives states. So, the more stressed, anxious, lonely or depressed you are, the more it matters that you take the time to exercise and care for yourself."

But it's important not to become too self-focused.

Social connection is foundational for a person's health and happiness. While social media can be very important for staying connected while physically distanced, it needs to be used properly.

The UNC-Chapel Hill data showed that the amount of time people spend

passively browsing social media—scrolling through feeds and looking for updates—was unrelated to positive states, and strongly linked to anxiety and other [negative feelings](#).

"If your feeds are like ours, they're mostly composed of distressing news and politicking. Keeping up with these endless streams is far from uplifting," says Frederickson.

People who spend more time actively interacting with others experience more positive and fewer negative emotions. This was true for introverts and extraverts alike, and especially for people living alone, according to the researchers' data.

"Importantly, it matters how one is interacting with others," said Michael M. Prinzing, a graduate fellow at the Parr Center for Ethics at UNC-Chapel Hill who works in the PEP lab. "Time spent interacting face-to-face or by voice or [video call](#) came with more [positive emotions](#), whereas time spent in text-based interaction did not."

Interacting with others does not seem to help much when you can't see or hear the people you are communicating with, the researchers said.

"This was a useful wake-up call for us. We thought we were doing ourselves good by keeping up via text. But the evidence suggests this isn't as valuable as we thought," said Prinzing. "It's much harder to establish a meaningful connection with someone via text."

It's a good [time](#) to bring back the humble phone call and take advantage of the many video-calling platforms.

Finally, those who went out of their way to help others experienced more positive states than those who didn't.

"Crises provide ample opportunities for kindness," said Frederickson. "You can donate face masks or other equipment to healthcare workers. If you're healthy, you can donate much-needed blood. Such altruistic acts aren't just good for those receiving help. They're good for those giving it as well."

Resilience—handling life's challenges and bouncing back from setbacks—increases not from avoiding negative states, but from increasing positive emotional states.

To have a better day during a pandemic, it's vital that everyone MARCH together, say Carolina researchers who offer this summary of their findings:

- Minimize passive scrolling through [social media](#)
- Accept negative emotion
- Really connect with people
- Care for yourself
- Help others

"It's more important than usual for people to stay connected and help each other," said Frederickson.

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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