

# Meaningful lockdown activity is more satisfying than busyness

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New research shows people who pursue meaningful activities—things they enjoy doing—during lockdown feel more satisfied than those who simply keep themselves busy.

The study, published in *PLOS ONE*, shows you're better off doing what you love and adapting it to suit social distancing, like swapping your regular morning walk with friends for a zoom exercise session.

Simply increasing your level of [activity](#) by doing mindless busywork will leave you unsettled and unsatisfied.

Co-lead researcher Dr. Lauren Saling from RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia said while novelty lockdown activities—like baking or painting—have their place, trying to continue what you enjoyed before lockdown can be more rewarding.

"Busyness might be distracting but it won't necessarily be fulfilling," she said.

"Rather, think about what activities you miss most and try and find a way of doing them."

Survey participants rated their level of wellbeing as it was during social distancing and retrospectively one month beforehand.

They also indicated how much time they spent engaged in various activities and nominated how important each activity was for them.

Although participants reported feeling more positive emotions while

doing novelty 'meaningless' activities like binge watching TV, they also felt more negative emotions—they felt unhappy just as much as they felt happy.

But when substituting activities enjoyed before lockdown—like dining with friends—for a virtual alternative, their positive and negative emotions were more subdued.

Saling said busyness riles you up, prompting you to change your behavior, but meaningful activity—doing what you enjoy—calms you down.

"Extreme emotions are not necessarily a good thing," she said.

"Emotions are a mechanism to make you change your behavior.

"But when you're doing what you love, it makes sense that you feel more balanced—simply keeping busy isn't satisfying."

Saling said the study challenged assumptions that we are either happy or sad and that we can stave off sadness by keeping busy.

Rather, those who kept busy with mindless tasks felt more frustrated and even when they were happy felt less fulfilled.

"The study showed positive and [negative affect](#) worked together, not as opposites," Saling said.

"Respondents who simply stayed busy during lockdown reported an increase in both positive and [negative emotions](#).

"This heightened emotionality will tend to shift you away from activity in general and towards meaningful activity."

The study also found the biggest change in [positive emotions](#) before and during lockdown was experienced by people aged under 40.

Saling said this was likely because it was harder for that age group to successfully substitute meaningful activities into a [lockdown](#) context.

**More information:** Daniel B. Cohen et al. Increased meaningful activity while social distancing dampens affectivity; mere busyness heightens it: Implications for well-being during COVID-19, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0244631](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244631)

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