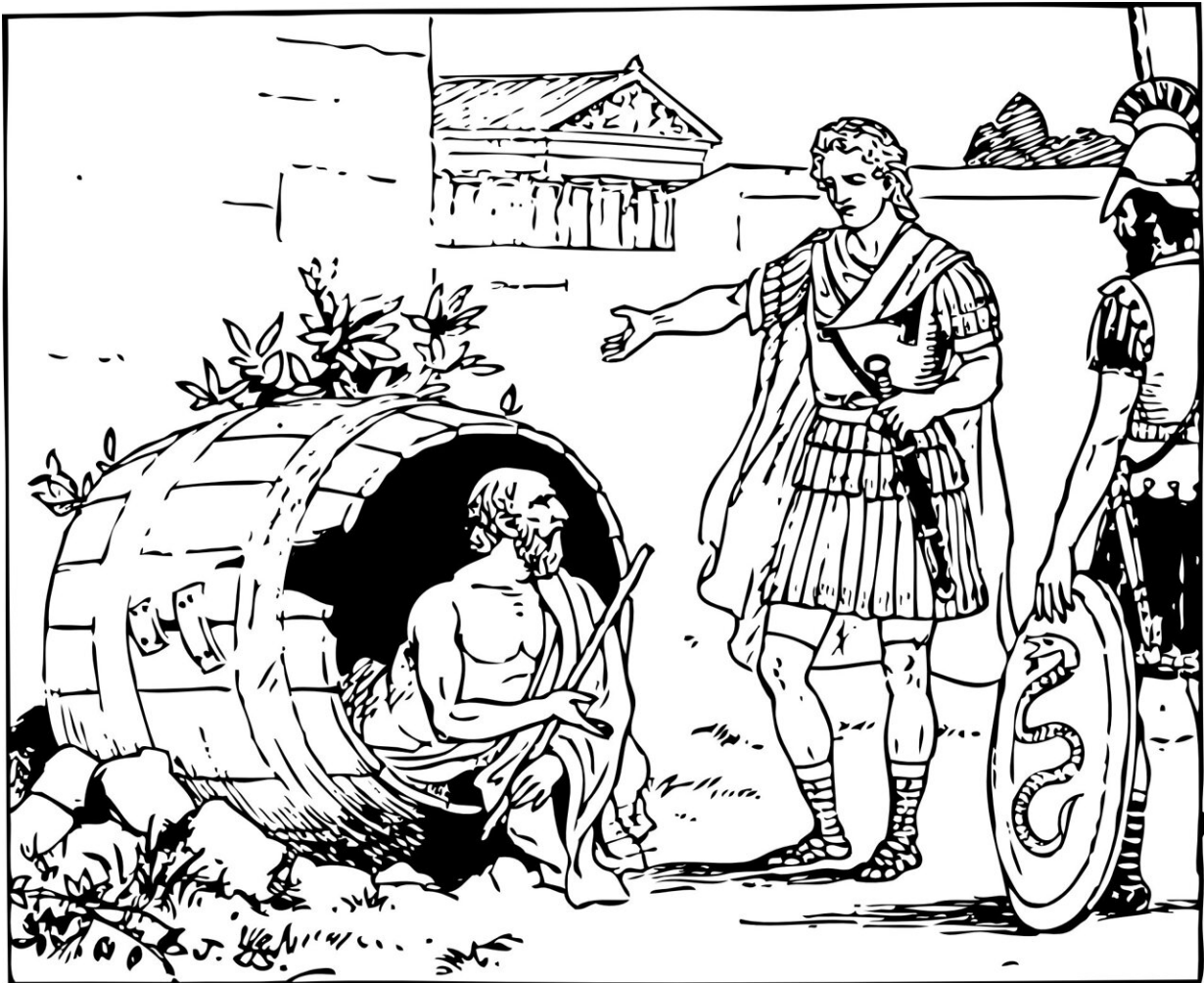


There's a bright side to being a 'Debbie Downer'

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New research shows that keeping busy with a variety of activities can elicit both positive and negative emotions, and some of the relationship could depend on your age. A new study published in the *Journal of Gerontology* finds that engaging in diverse daily activities is associated with a diverse set of emotions.

"Experiencing a broad spectrum of emotions is adaptive and beneficial to health because it means having a more balanced and nuanced appraisal of daily life," said Soomi Lee, assistant professor of aging studies in the USF College of Behavioral and Community Sciences. "For example, even for negative emotions, feeling intense anger across situations may mean that the individual has a narrow appraisal of situations, whereas feeling a mix of anger, sadness and shame may indicate a broader and more nuanced appraisal."

Lee reviewed data collected on nearly 3,000 middle-aged participants enrolled in the Midlife in the United States Study who are considered relatively healthy and well-educated. She found individuals who regularly participated in a broad range of daily activities experienced diverse emotional experiences—both positive and negative—with those between ages 33-44 experiencing more diverse positive emotions compared to those between ages 68-84.

The study looked at the amount of time individuals spent participating in seven activities: paid work, spending time with children, chores, leisure, [physical activities](#), formal volunteering and helping someone outside of their household, such as a neighbor. Participants recorded their activities for eight consecutive days, as well as their positive and negative emotions, which were used to calculate emodiversity scores.

Emodiversity is a term used to describe rich and balanced emotions. Emodiversity was broken into 13 positive emotions: cheerful, in good spirits, extremely happy, calm and peaceful, satisfied, full of life,

enthusiastic, attentive, proud, active, close to others, belonging and confident, as well as 14 [negative emotions](#): worthlessness, nervous, restless or fidgety, hopeless, afraid, jittery, irritable, ashamed, upset, lonely, angry, frustrated, that everything is an effort and so sad that nothing could cheer you up.

Lee says the younger demographic may have stronger emotions than older adults since their activities are more diverse. Many spend more time at work and with children, which tends to decrease with age. Also, [older adults](#) may have more muted or monotonic emotions as a result of wisdom or their strategy to reduce the range of novel social interactions to avoid potentially negative situations. Interestingly, the overall amount of time spent participating in activities was not associated with neither positive nor negative emodiversity, suggesting that total activity time is not what matters, but rather that an even amount of time is spent participating in a broad range of activities.

In addition to emodiversity, previous studies have found greater activity diversity is also associated with higher psychological well-being, better cognitive functioning and brain volume that governs memory and learning.

More information: Soomi Lee et al, Rich and Balanced Experiences of Daily Emotions are Associated with Activity Diversity Across Adulthood, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* (2021). [DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbab144](#)

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