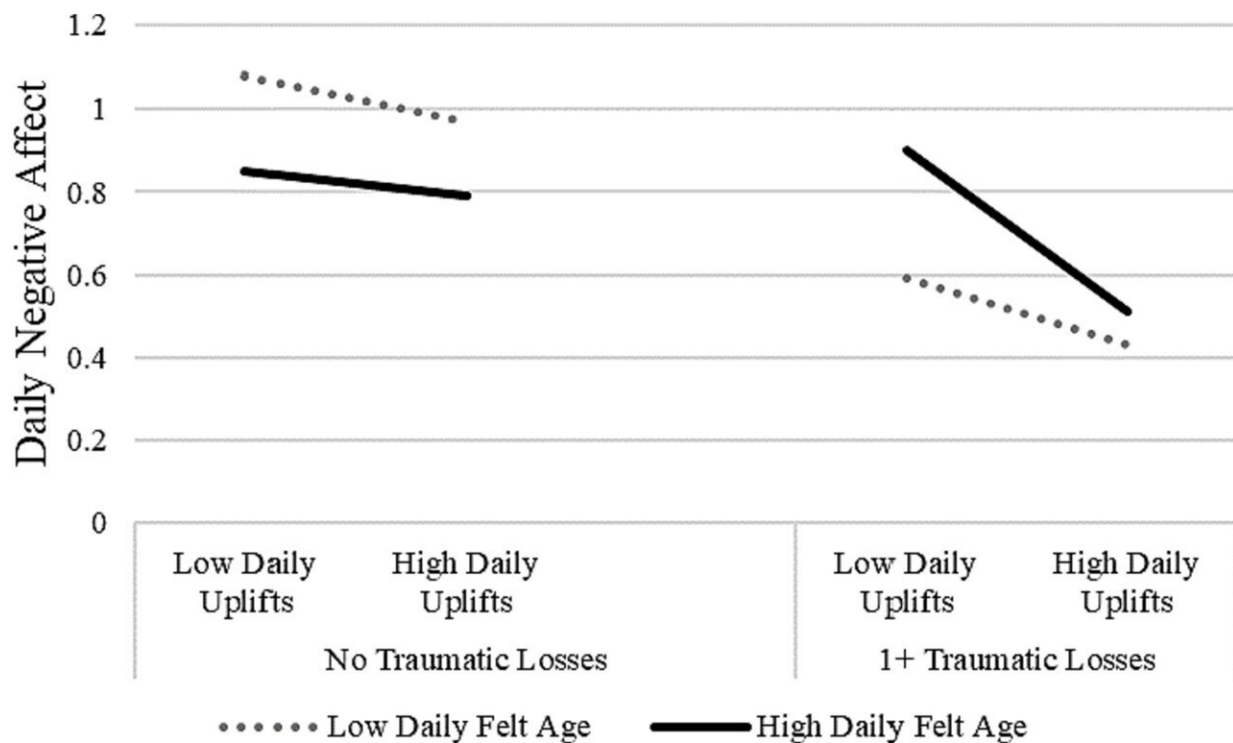


Research highlights simple things we can do to cope with traumatic loss

February 7 2024, by Matt Shipman



A significant three-way cross-level interaction between daily uplifts, daily felt age, and individual differences in traumatic losses predicting daily negative affect. The effect of uplifts on negative affect did not depend on felt age for those who reported no traumatic losses (left side), but there was a significant interaction between uplifts and felt age for those who reported one or more traumatic losses (right side). There were 358 participants who experienced at least one traumatic loss and 82 participants who reported no traumatic losses. Credit: *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* (2024). DOI: 10.1111/aphw.12530

A new study finds there are simple activities that can help people improve their mood and emotional well-being on a day-to-day basis after the traumatic loss of a loved one.

"The untimely or traumatic death of close friends or family is emotionally taxing, and navigating grief can be difficult," says Caitlin Reynolds, co-author of the study and a Ph.D. student at North Carolina State University. "Our study suggests there are specific things people can do to bolster their [emotional well-being](#) following a traumatic loss."

"We were conducting a larger study that looked at how daily behaviors affect emotional well-being and day-to-day functioning, and we realized that a significant number of study participants were dealing with the traumatic loss of a loved one," says Shevaun Neupert, corresponding author of the study and a professor of psychology at NC State. "This gave us an opportunity to gain insights into how daily behaviors in the wake of a loss can influence our emotional well-being."

For the study, researchers worked with data from 440 U.S. adults between the ages of 50 and 85. 356 of the study participants reported the traumatic loss of a loved one. Study participants completed a daily diary survey for 14 consecutive days. The survey questions were designed to capture changes in each participant's day-to-day lived experiences and "affect"—or mood.

"The survey questions also helped us capture information related to subjective age, or how old people report feeling each day," Neupert says. "Do they feel older than they actually are? Younger? And how does that correlate to their mood or emotional well-being?"

"One of the study's big findings is that activities we call 'uplifts' can have a significant impact," says Ali Early, co-author of the study and a former undergraduate at NC State.

Uplifts refer to a variety of activities that can improve our [mood](#), such as:

- Completing a task;
- Getting enough sleep;
- Dining out;
- Visiting, phoning or writing a friend; or
- Spending time with family.

"Uplifts were good for everyone, but there is some nuance in not only who is most impacted, but when the uplifts are most powerful," Neupert says. "For example, we found that the positive effect of uplifts was more pronounced for people who had experienced traumatic loss, and especially so on days when they reported feeling older."

The findings held true even when researchers accounted for the socioeconomic status of study participants, their age and the age at which they first experienced a traumatic loss.

"In other words, there are things we can do—which are accessible for most people—to improve our moods," Neupert says. "And those things can help us most on days when we most need it."

The paper, "[Traumatic Losses Permeate Daily Emotional Experiences: Roles of Daily Uplifts and Subjective Age](#)," is published [open access](#) in the journal *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*.

More information: Alexandra S. Early et al, Traumatic losses permeate daily emotional experiences: roles of daily uplifts and subjective age, *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/aphw.12530](#)

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