

Judging your own happiness could backfire: Experiencing emotions with acceptance is more useful, study finds

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Judging how happy you are could backfire and negatively impact life satisfaction and psychological well-being, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

In three experiments comprising more than 1,800 participants, researchers found that having concerns or judgments about one's own level of [happiness](#) were associated with lower well-being, due in part to greater negativity and disappointment about positive events.

The research was published in the journal *Emotion*.

Thinking too much about one's own level of happiness could be related to fears about not measuring up or not being as happy as other people, said lead researcher Felicia Zerwas, Ph.D., who was a doctoral student at the University of California-Berkeley during this research and is now a postdoctoral researcher at New York University.

"There are plenty of societal pressures, at least within the United States, which encourage the fallacy that people must feel happy all of the time to achieve greater well-being," she said. "Overall, allowing yourself to experience your emotions, whether they are positive or negative, with an accepting attitude could be a useful tool for pursuing happiness and increasing well-being."

Contrary to some previous studies, the current research found that the pursuit of happiness, or viewing happiness as a very important goal, didn't have any detrimental impacts on well-being. However, judging one's own level of happiness did.

The research included various samples of participants, including Yale University students, community members from Denver and Berkeley, California, and online studies with participants from the United States and Canada.

The participants answered questions about their beliefs about happiness, as well as their psychological well-being and depressive symptoms. Being concerned about one's own happiness was associated with lower

overall [life satisfaction](#) and [psychological well-being](#), as well as greater [depressive symptoms](#).

The research also found that having concerns about one's own happiness was associated with greater negativity about positive events.

"Having high expectations for one's happiness can be detrimental because it makes it more difficult to achieve the level of happiness that we are expecting from a positive event," Zerwas said.

More information: Unpacking the Pursuit of Happiness: Being Concerned About Happiness but Not Aspiring to Happiness Is Linked With Negative Meta-Emotions and Worse Well-Being, *Emotion* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/emo0001381](https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0001381)

Provided by American Psychological Association

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