

Something in the way we move

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PhD student Sophie Kenny works with Fabian Helm on the treadmill.

Being depressed is depressing in itself and makes you feel even worse. That is one reason why it is so hard to break out of depressive conditions.

New research out of Queen's University offers a new approach to do just

that. Nikolaus Troje (Psychology, Biology and School of Computing) along with clinical psychologists from the University of Hildesheim, Germany, have shown that walking in a happy or sad style actually affects our mood. Subjects who were prompted to walk in a more depressed style, with less [arm movement](#) and their shoulders rolled forward, experienced worse moods than those who were induced to walk in a happier style.

"It is not surprising that our mood, the way we feel, affects how we walk, but we wanted to see whether the way we move also affects how we feel," says Dr. Troje.

Dr. Troje presented the participants of the study with a list of positive and negative words, such as "pretty," "afraid" and "anxious" and then asked them to walk on a treadmill while the researchers measured and analyzed gait and posture in real time. While walking, participants were looking at a gauge whose reading depended on the result of this analysis – namely if their gait appeared to be rather happy or rather sad as indicated by features such as slump-shouldered (sad) or vertical bouncing (happy). Participants didn't know what the gauge was measuring. They were simply asked to make the gauge deflect from the neutral position. Some had to try to move the gauge left, while others were told to move it right.

Both participant groups quickly learned the task. Afterward, they had to write down as many words as they could remember from the earlier list of positive and negative words. Those who had been walking in a depressed style remembered many more negative words. The difference in recall suggests that the depressed walking style actually created a more [depressed mood](#).

"Clinically depressed patients are known to remember negative events," says Dr. Troje, "particularly those about themselves, much more than

positive life events. Remembering the bad can make them feel even worse. If we can break that self-perpetuating cycle, we might have a strong therapeutic tool to work with depressive patients."

Provided by Queen's University

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