



[HAPPINESS]

Pie in the Sky

BROAD THINKING BRINGS BROAD GRINS.

WHILE HAPPINESS CAN spark novel ideas, a new paper argues that the mood-creativity connection may run two ways: The very act of making associations could perk you up.

Rumination can make moods more negative, Moshe Bar, a psychologist at Harvard, points out. And thinking quickly about several different topics in sequence enhances mood. This effect may have evolved as a reward mechanism for gathering information. "In life, the more predictions we make, the stronger the likelihood we'll be successful," Bar says. Because uncertainty tends to bring on anxiety, generating forecasts will reduce uncertainty and therefore can be calming.

What are the neural mechanics of such a reward? "Many pathways in the brain release a large amount of endorphins when activated," Bar says. "If you keep activating new and different regions, you'll maximize your mood reward"—and avoid exhausting the supply in one area.

According to this line of thinking, the reason alcohol makes us feel good may be that it lowers inhibitions and affords a broader thinking pattern. Need a quick pick-me-up without getting drunk at work? See below for three options.

—Sara Reistad-Long

HAPPINESS AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT

■ **Do Something out of Character:** Inhibition and rumination are closely linked. Misbehave a little, buy a new outfit, talk to a stranger. Escape your comfort zone.

■ **Practice Speed-Reading:** Reading faster can improve mood, perhaps because of the rapid-fire volley of written associations. Even negative text can cheer you up.

■ **Look Ahead:** Depressed people are deficient in planning and foresight. Try imagining future outcomes rather than exploring things in the present or past.

[SLEEP]

Throw Away the Sleeping Pills

BELIEF IN SLEEP MEDS MAY INHIBIT SLEEP.

IS WORRYING ABOUT your sleep keeping you up at night? Research has shown that how you think about sleep can contribute to insomnia. But a recent study from the Duke University Medical Center suggests that a belief in the importance of medication for treatment might make insomnia sufferers especially resistant to a common psychotherapeutic approach.

Many insomniacs worry about falling asleep and feel helpless. While all participants showed some improvement following cognitive-behavioral therapy, those who insisted medication was necessary to overcome their insomnia remained abnormally worried about their sleep. Study coauthor Jack Edinger suggests that therapy must first "target the beliefs people have about medications and provide some challenge to those" before it can be effective.

—Avigail Gordon



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