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Attitude About Past Influences Health

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Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on September 7, 2011

When we think of the past we can choose to do so in a positive or negative framework. New research suggests people's attitudes or perspective about the past plays a role in how individuals perceive current and future events.

In other words, remembering the past in a positive context can help to improve your health.

Researchers from the University of Granada (UGR) discovered people's attitude to past events influences their perception of health and their quality of life.

"We have observed that when people are negative about past events in their life, they also have a pessimist or fatalistic attitude towards current events.

"This generates greater problems in their relationships and these people present worse quality of life indicators," explained Cristián Oyanadel, UGR researcher and co-author of the study.

Researchers studied 50 individuals (25 women and 25 men between 20 and 70 years old) chosen from a randomized sample. Each participant received a battery of standardized questionnaires and time orientation tests. The time orientation profile includes five dimensions that describe attitudes towards the past, the present and the future.

Once grouped by profiles in accordance with their time perspective, respondents had to complete a quality of life survey to measure their physical and mental health.

"According to what we have observed in our study, the most influencing dimension is the perception of the past. A negative view of the past is highly related to worse health indicators," noted researcher Oyanadel.

Researchers discovered people who tend to be negative find it hard to make a physical effort in their day-to-day activities and have physical limitations for work performance; they perceive greater bodily pain and are more likely to become ill.

"Furthermore, they generally tend to be [depressive](#), anxious and present behavioral changes," he added.

In the study, participants were found to have three time profiles: mainly negative, mainly future-oriented and well-balanced.

Researchers say the balanced profile is the ideal one, given that it provides a healthy attitude in the three time zones.

"They are people that learn positively from past experiences. They are more focused on achieving future goals and demand a lot of themselves, but they do not neglect that they need to have emotions and live pleasant experiences."

Among the balanced group, researchers discovered individuals were physically stronger with better general mental health. They were not as likely to become ill and reported discomfort and body pain less often.

Among the group that were strongly future-focused, i.e. those that put their personal goals before everything, researchers discovered a diminished appreciation of current pleasant experiences, and a poor connection to their positive past experiences.

"They are not physically or mentally unhealthy but have a lower quality of life than the well-balanced group," concluded Oyanadel.

Source: [FECYT – Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology](#)

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