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Remembering The Past Negatively Worsens Health

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Going back to work after the holidays is a nightmare for many. Can you improve your health by remembering the past in a positive way? A study by the University of Granada (UGR) reports that people's attitude to past events, present experiences or future expectations, 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 published in the journal *Universitas Psychologica*.

Researchers assessed 50 individuals (25 women and 25 men between 20 and 70 years old) from a randomised sample, using questionnaires and time orientation tests. The time orientation profile was measured by applying the "Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory", designed in the United States and validated in several countries including Spain. This test 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.

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.

Thinking about the future does not harm health

Three time profiles were found from the study participants, corresponding to three styles: mainly negative and mainly future-oriented – the two extremes – and a well-balanced group.

"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."

Furthermore, these people score higher because they are physically stronger, have better general mental health, are less likely to become ill and do not notice discomfort and body pain as much.

"On the other hand, people that are more future-focused, i.e. those that put their personal goals before everything, forget to live pleasant experiences and are not very connected 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.

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