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Happiness expert: One technique for staying upbeat during the pandemic

Published Sun, Oct 25 2020 • 8:32 PM EDT



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As the [coronavirus](#) pandemic rages on, it can be difficult to remain upbeat.

Aside from the health implications and associated financial stressors, uncertainty over the outcome of the virus has eroded one of the key contributors to our overall happiness, making optimism hard to obtain.

"A sense of control is very important for happiness," Tali Sharot, a cognitive neuroscientist and author of "The Optimism Bias," told [CNBC Make It](#).

Indeed, in her research during the height of lockdowns, Sharot and her peers at University College London found that [control was the number one contributor to people's overall level of happiness](#): Those who felt they had a sense of agency in their day-to-day lives were far happier than those who did not.

In the months since then, people have adapted to the pandemic and the average person's happiness level has returned to a "baseline," said Sharot, describing happiness like a treadmill.



Tali Sharot, cognitive neuroscientist at University College London and author of "The Optimism Bias" Tali Sharot

"You can go up and down, but people do converge to a certain baseline of happiness," she said. "That's true when things are very, very difficult; they eventually find their way back to that baseline. But also when things are good; after a while, they adapt to these good things and go back to the baseline."

However, that doesn't mean we shouldn't find new ways to boost our happiness levels, said Sharot.

One of the best ways of doing that is to start making plans, or what she calls "anticipatory events." Such tactics can not only help us regain feelings of excitement but also that sense of control, she said.

"Anticipation makes us happy in and of itself," said Sharot. Indeed, [in a 2010 Dutch study of close to 1,000 holidaymakers](#), researchers found that the act of planning a holiday contributes a greater boost to respondents' happiness levels than the aftermath of the trip itself.

Of course, planning for the future can be easier said than done right now. With so many unknowns ahead and further potential lockdowns looming, it can be difficult to arrange anything with certainty.

However, such plans don't need to be huge or immovable. They could range from vacation for next summer to smaller highlights like dinner with friends, watching a movie or going on a hike.

"It's important to still get into the habit of making those plans, putting them in the diary, and having things that we can look forward to," she said.

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