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*Journals Division*

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☺ **Put on a Happy Face: It Helps You See the Big Picture**

That photo of your smiling kids on the refrigerator door might do more than just make you feel good; you might make healthier food choices after looking at it. A new study in the [\*Journal of Consumer Research\*](#) shows that positive moods can increase our ability to understand the big picture.

“A positive mood enhances efforts to attain future well-being, encourages broader and flexible thinking, and increases openness to information,” write the study’s authors Aparna A. Labroo (University of Chicago) and Vanessa M. Patrick (University of Georgia).

The researchers investigated the scientific basis for the simple practice of surrounding oneself with positive things. The first study presented identical statements to study participants. The statements in each set were preceded by either a smiley face (☺) or a frowny face (☹). “The results revealed that simply associating a smiley with a statement resulted in the statement being construed at a higher, more abstract level.”

In follow-up studies, the authors induced positive and negative moods by asking participants to describe either the happiest or unhappiest days in their lives. They then filled out three different questionnaires to determine the level of abstract versus concrete thinking. All three questionnaires showed that people in a good mood thought more abstractly.

The authors explain that being in a good mood allows people to step back emotionally. “The research demonstrates that by signaling that a situation is benign, a positive mood allows people to psychologically distance themselves from the situation,” the authors write.

“Those in a positive mood not only adopt higher-order future goals and work harder toward attaining them, but also reduce their efforts when goals are proximal or concrete,” they conclude.

Aparna A. Labroo and Vanessa M. Patrick. “Why Happiness Helps You See the Big Picture” *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2009.

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