



Why do so many people talk about feeling COVID-unhappy? Here a solution!

Yesterday, I went for a long walk with a friend with a loving partner, living in a big house with a garden, comfortably working - employed in a large stable company - from home. Sounds like the best situation to have in COVID, right? But still, we had the conversation, how down we felt. How few things feel good. How “fun” seems to be this weird, foreign sentiment. Of course, we debated what to do with and about that “feeling”,.. but really,... many of us feel that way – even if we are not struggling to put bread on a table which in turn has a roof over it, no?

So, I dug a little deeper. Humans are creatures of habit. That has its roots in a time long ago when routines helped us survive [“Eat these berries and you are healthy” – “walk too close to the water and the crocs will get you”]. When traditions and routines are disturbed, then our brain needs to be more vigilant analyzing new data, evaluating risks, and finding new solutions and that costs a lot of energy.

That disturbance of habit on top of the general feeling of fear, hopelessness, confinement, and overreach of certain groups creates a fertile ground for negative outcomes: People urgently wanting to hold on to established habits despite the environment currently not really allowing for that. Many either are likely to deny COVID with all implications or they psychologically hold on to habits and feel unhappy as something they want is not achievable anymore.

All that extra thinking comes of course at a cost: the thinking brain uses ~20% of energy used by our body even though it only has ~2% of bodyweight. So no, you are not more tired because it gets darker outside earlier. Or at least not just. It also is stemming from your brain draining energy as it has to think far more flexibly and creatively.

The solution of all this is: create new habits, rituals and traditions. Yes, it takes a while before a new behavior actually feels like a ritual and we can influence that through thinking of it as a new ritual, a new habit and that will already help to have the calming effects taking place. So: Instead of the Wednesday beer with friends, decide this week on a new beer to try, you all buy it during the week – then do a virtual beer tasting next Wednesday. Drink that tea with a piece of cake or cookie at 4pm because you can while working from home.

Instead of having X-mas dinner all together, create a fun menu with different courses and have people rotate in and out if they are close enough to come in and go without hour long drives. Otherwise use that menu to cook the same across the different branches of the family and compare taste and look notes.

Create new routines, try new things and feel safer, satisfied and – guess what – happier!