



## Why do so many people talk about feeling COVID-unhappy? Let's talk solution!

Yesterday, I went for a long walk with a friend. She and her loving partner live in a big house with a garden, comfortably working - employed in a large stable company - from home. Sounds like the dream situation to have in COVID, right? However, we had a conversation, about 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. This took roots a long time ago when routines helped us survive ["Eat these berries and you will be healthy" – "walk too close to the water and the crocs will get you"]. When traditions and routines are disturbed, our brain needs to be more vigilant analyzing new data, evaluating risks, and finding new solutions and that uses a lot of energy.

This COVID-related disturbance of habit, on top of the general feeling of fear, hopelessness, confinement, creates a fertile ground for negative outcomes: People urgently trying to hold on to established habits despite the environment currently not really allowing for that. Many are either likely to deny COVID with all its implications or they psychologically hold on to habits and feel unhappy as something they want is no longer available or achievable.

All that "re-thinking" and "re-evaluating" comes 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 is getting darker outside earlier. Or at least not just because of that. It also stems from your brain draining energy as it must think far more flexibly and creatively.

### **So, what is the solution to this? Create new habits, rituals and traditions.**

Yes, it takes a while before a new behavior actually feels like a ritual but we can influence that through thinking of it as a new ritual, a new habit. This alone will already have a calming effect.

- 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!