Health and Happiness

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Introduction:

Objectives

• Explain current evidence about the relationship between positive emotion and physical health
• Apply specific positive psychology interventions with cardiac and pulmonary patients to improve wellness and outcomes

Positive Emotions

• Happiness
• Joy
• Peace / serenity
• Contentment
• Amusement
• Gratitude
• Awe
• Love
• Hope
• Excitement
• Cheerfulness
• Pride
• Inspiration
• Calm

Feel Good, Feel Good

• Those who are happier are healthier
• Those who are happier live longer
• Those who are happier bounce back from adversity (resilience)

No disclosures
Fill yourself up with good!

Positive Emotion and Behavioral Health
- Meaningfulness
- Optimism
- Benefit-finding / personal growth

The relationship between positive states and health outcomes is not explained by the detrimental effects of negative states or traits.

Positive Emotion and Physical Health
- ↑ physical health, QOL, longevity
- ↓ symptomatology, and mortality risk
- Influence autonomic function, respiration, and hemodynamics
  - accelerating cardiovascular recovery following a negative emotion or stressor
- Healthier immune functioning
  - Faster healing, ↓ inflammation
  - ↓ stress hormone response
- High-arousal affect (e.g., excitement vs calm)

Positive Emotion and Cardiovascular Disease
- ↓ risk of coronary heart disease – Rate of incident CHD ↓ 22% lower for 1-pt ↑ positive affect score
- ↓ cardiovascular death
- ↓ rehospitalization after CABG
- ↓ CVD progression
- ↑ recovery from event
- ↓ 24-hr risk of arrhythmia in Long QT syndrome (OR .60)

Pressman et al., 2019; Davidson et al., 2010; Steptoe et al., 2009; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2002; Miller et al., 1994; Giltay et al., 2006; Kubzansky et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2005; Scheier et al., 1989, 1999; Sears, Serber, et al., 2004; Tindle et al., 2009
Positive Emotion and Pulmonary Disease

- Independent association with QOL, after adjusting for age, breathlessness measures and degree of bronchial obstruction (FEV1% predicted)
- Positivity ratio inversely associated with breathlessness
- Sense of humor associated with improved wellbeing and QOL
  - Laughing aloud may cause pulmonary function deterioration 2/2 hyperinflation
- In lung cancer, adaptive social functioning, fewer emotion-based role limitations, and less bodily pain; over and above negative affect.
  - "Maintaining positive affect may result in greater perceived health"

"Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"

What Determines Happiness?

- "The ability to be happy and contented with life is a central criterion of adaptation and positive mental health..."
  - Chronic Happiness (def): frequent positive affect, high life satisfaction, and infrequent negative affect
- On the pursuit
  - Happiness is within an individual's control to a certain extent, and is amenable to intervention
  - "Happiness set point" 50% – leaving ~40-50% modifiable

Uniqueness

- It is not the absence of distress or disorder
- It is not the bipolar opposite
- Focus on healthy living and wellbeing
- Satisfaction with life rather than ridding of psychopathology or distress
- Goal of improving and adding to life (vs. ridding or remediating)
- Focus on positive content and/or positive outcome

Types/Foci of Positive Interventions

- Strength-based; generally "identify and use"
- Gratitude
- Forgiveness
- Social Connections
- Meaning
- Savoring
- Perspective Taking
- Physical Activity

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[Images and diagrams related to positive psychology and interventions]
Positive Psychology Intervention Outcomes

Improvements in:
- Cognitive processes
- Social behavior
- Motivation
- Self-efficacy
- Ability to cope with stressful life events
- Willingness

Benzo et al., 2016

Giving you the Scoop (before the press)

• Positive Psychology intervention in a clinical trial:
  - ↓ ventricular episodes
  - ↑ HRV and vagal tone
  - ↑ time feeling happy, overall happiness, QOL, return to function, physical function
  - ↓ time feeling unhappy, negative emotion

MORE TO COME!

Serber et al (in prep)

Next steps:

• More clinical trials on positive affect and health
  - Particularly among pulmonary populations

• Wheels are turning to write a grant for Cardiopulmonary Rehab patients
  - Adjunctive positive psychology interventions concurrent with CR/PR
  - Shhhh, you didn’t hear me say this.

Overall Approach in lay terms

• Focus on the “cans” not the “cannots”
• Add to life
• Where your attention is, is where your focus will be
• “How will this help me get closer to my goal?” “Is this aligned with what I value?”

Quotes / Mantras / Positive self-talk

• “Only one thing has to change for us to know happiness in our lives: where we focus our attention.” – Greg Anderson
• The only part of the outcome you can control, is your effort level and your focus.

Application:
Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

19
20
21
22
23
24
Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

Physical Activity!

Three Good Things
• Identify 3 things that went well each day and reflect on why they occurred.

Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

Strengths
• Identify one strength of yours a day, and how you applied it each day

Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

Gratitude
• Count blessings. Appreciate life’s circumstances.
• Write a letter of gratitude to a person and read it out loud to that person.

Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

Flow
• Being in the zone, is the mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity; complete absorption in what one does, and a resulting loss in one’s sense of space and time.
• Increase the number of activities or time spent in a flow activity

Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

Savoring
• Focus intently on positive experiences 2-3 times each day
Positive Emotion Enhancing Activities

Acts of Kindness
• Perform good deeds for others, whether friends or strangers, planned or spontaneous, directly or anonymously

Thank you!