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Study Finds Mindful Individuals Not As Affected by Immediate Rewards

By JANICE WOOD Associate News Editor

Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on November 3, 2013

A new study shows that people who are aware of their own thoughts and emotions are less impulsive and less affected by immediate rewards, such as positive feedback from others.

Using electroencephalography (EEG) to record the brain activity of the study's participants, University of Toronto Scarborough, Ph.D., candidate Rimma Teper found that individuals high in "trait mindfulness" showed less neural response to positive feedback than their less mindful peers.

"These findings suggest that mindful individuals may be less affected by immediate rewards and fits well with the idea that mindful individuals are typically less impulsive," she said.

Trait mindfulness is characterized by an ability to recognize and accept one's thoughts and emotions without judgment, she explained. Mindful individuals are much better at letting their feelings and thoughts go rather than getting carried away, she elaborated.

For the study, researchers recorded the brain activity of participants while they completed a reaction time task on a computer.

The researchers said they were specifically interested in brain activity in response to receiving performance feedback that was rewarding, neutral or negative.

What they found was that not only were mindful individuals less responsive to rewarding feedback, they also showed less difference in their neural response to neutral versus rewarding feedback.

The findings support the notion that accepting one's emotions is an important indicator of mental well-being, according to the researchers.

"Individuals who are problem gamblers, for instance, show more brain reactivity to immediate rewards, because they are typically more impulsive," Teper said.

"Many studies, including our own past work, have shown that people who meditate and mindful individuals exhibit improved self-control," added Dr. Michael Inzlicht, Teper's Ph.D. supervisor and a UTSC psychology professor. "If mindful individuals are also less affected by immediate rewards, as our study suggests, this may help explain why."

The study was published in the journal *Emotion*.

Source: [University of Toronto Scarborough](#)

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