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Reducing the Impact Bias in Colorectal Cancer Screening Expectations

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Abstract

Past research has shown that when predicting how a future event will make them feel, people over-estimate the intensity and duration of their emotions, a phenomenon known as the impact bias. When it comes to deciding about colorectal cancer screening, older adults face many psychological barriers related to the anticipated embarrassment, disgust, and pain of screening. Qualitative research suggests these barriers may be characterized by an impact bias. In this study, 17 older adult participants were presented with a message about colon cancer and screening. We tested whether highlighting some participants' adaptive potential would lower their expectations of intensity and duration of these barriers. Findings showed that relative to a control condition, participants who wrote about a time when they emotionally adapted to a past event gave lower maximum pain estimates and marginally lower perceived duration of pain estimates. These results have implications for the design of future adaptation exercises.

Keywords: colorectal cancer screening, impact bias, adaptation neglect

