



# Positive Effects of Reliable Social Connections and Self-reward in Life on Depression Treatment and Prevention

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**Abstract.** In previous studies, we can find some simple and effective impetus (such as complete a small goal of even after finish one day, and then taking a small reward) plays a key role in the treatment and prevention of depression. At the same time, reliable social ties can also play a positive role in curing patients with depression. The present study proposes that there are some similarities between these two factors. They both act as an anchor point to keep depressed people in their normal lives rather than immersed in depression.

**Keywords:** Depression · social connect · CBT · IPT · therapy

## 1 Introduction

The premise of cognitive therapy is that changing maladaptive thoughts will lead to changes in emotion and behavior. Therefore, a series of treatments and guidance can change patients' thoughts and thus affect their emotion and behavior, which is the mechanism of CBT [1]. And, according to the theory of Pavlov, our dopamine can be manipulation, and changing the secretion of dopamine can, in turn, affect people's thought and behavior. In the first part of the theory of anchor, by setting up simple goal, and when the patient achieved the goal, let them reward themselves, by creating a conditioned response that gradually redirects the dopamine produced by rewards to the task itself, patients can get a steady, sustainable, and less stimulating source of dopamine throughout the day, while also having something to look forward to in their daily lives. This can greatly affect the patient's life pattern, make the patient more optimistic, thus fundamentally treating depression.

## 2 The Effect of Reward System

Among a range of psychological problems, anhedonia leading to a failure of interest (depression) and restlessness (anxiety and mania) can be caused by a breakdown of the hedonic system. Pleasure, or pleasure itself, comes from a large brain system called the pleasure system or reward system. The most famous of these is the dopamine system [2].

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According to Cannon and Bseikri, the dopamine system is the primary driver of desire, and is therefore essential for learning, eating, playing, and socializing behavior [3]. So, let us imagine what would happen if the dopamine system disappeared. First, since people can't feel the pleasure brought by the awarding dopamine, they will gradually lose the desire, and will not be able to gain happiness from entertainment, and then will lose most of the interest hobby, and at the same time, because they lost dopamine, their mood will become depressed, become indifferent to everything around. These psychological disorders all match with the symptoms of depression. In the study of Taylor, Zald, Felger et al., the decline of dopamine has a negative impact on cognition, reward processing and motor function, and significantly increases the probability of depression [4].

So how do we get dopamine consistently? The answer is reward. By achieving small daily goals and then rewarding yourself for achieving them, you get a steady stream of dopamine, and the anticipation of a reward for achieving your goal gives people more motivation and keeps them looking forward to life. This is especially important for the prevention of depression.

When people are busy in work or study, they will gradually lose hope, for the future without expectation, and the more people no expectation for the future, they will be more difficult to find a way to keep their hope, this is a kind of Asia common circulation. In Japan where had high suicide rate, people often commit suicide because they cannot find any hope and meaning in life amid endless work. A long-term, dead-end job is a constant source of psychological and physical stress, which can lead to symptoms of depression. Goal-reward systems do an excellent job of avoiding this.

For example, a man loves strawberry cake, then he can give himself a small target, such as after finish today's work, he will have a piece of strawberry cake as a reward. Reward, of course, can be different forms, it better be some entertainment activities, because these recreational activities can help people to avoid the occurrence of depression symptoms better. When people have a goal and looking forward to the reward, then you will feel less stressed because their mind is focused on the reward that will follow. Just like distracting during a long run to reduce the pain. Giving a goal and a corresponding reward under intense, constant pressure can be a great distraction that reduces the amount of stress. This can directly reduce the risk of depression symptoms.

According to Tomoyoshi Kondo, rewarding behavior does provide some motivation. In his article, a peasant woman with Parkinson's disease keeps her condition from getting worse for seven years because her daily mountain climbing which is fuelled by money [5].

This kind of driving force can let people in the case of completely not interested to participate in some hobby, after accumulate over a long period of the reward, dopamine will eventually be transferred to your ongoing activities such as playing chess or excise from getting the reward, and when people can obtain dopamine from these activities, they can feel thrill from these activities, which, though deceptive at first, can still keep them interested in something and still make their life a little more enjoyable. And if people can take an interest in some recreational activities, they are keeping depression at bay, which has important implications for depression prevention and treatment.

### **3 The Effect of Stable Social Relationships on Patients**

Stable social relationships are a vital component of social support, it's the kind of strong relationships people have with close friends, family, and partners. This kind of relationship can provide people with reliable emotional support, which can be especially important for the prevention and treatment of depression. In research by Johnson-Esparza and his colleagues, they found that social support played a key role in buffering Latino students from perceived stress and symptoms of depression or anxiety [6].

In their study, Bachem and colleagues found that social support played a key role in preventing depression among veterans [7]. Similarly, in Canavan and colleagues' research, it was found that policies that encourage education, promote financial and health literacy, and strengthen families may reduce vulnerability to the mental health effects of unemployment, with social support buffering the relationship between involuntary unemployment and depressive symptoms [8].

Obviously, social connections act as a buffer, a bit like insurance, to stabilize us psychologically and spiritually in the face of unexpected and traumatic events. That is one of the main reasons I listed it as an anchor. It acts like an anchor, allowing us to stabilize ourselves while taking the wind and waves, rather than capsizing in them. Having constant social support, such as loving family, reliable friends, and a good partner, allows us to withstand more stress and trauma from life and keep our mind stable rather than out of control.

For those suffering from depression and other psychological disorders, it is very important to help them maintain a stable state of mind. As a group with a high risk of suicide, depressed patients can greatly improve their sense of belonging if they have a solid social relationship. According to the three-element theory of suicide, the primary condition for suicide is a frustrated sense of belonging. When depressed patients have sufficient and healthy social relations and social support, they will not be able to satisfy this frustrated sense of belonging, and the risk of suicide will be greatly reduced.

Interpersonal psychotherapy is a focused approach to depression and other disorders that focus on the intersection of interpersonal dysfunction and psychotic symptoms. The generation of depressive symptoms is related to difficulties in interpersonal relationship, social role, social support and social attachment. By paying attention to the social relationship of patients with depression and helping patients establish some firm, reliable and lasting social relationship, it will help patients get closer to the society and solve the lack of social support for patients. It can relieve or even cure depression.

### **4 How Do Stable Relationships and Goal-Reward Mechanism Work as Anchor**

Stable social relationships provide stable social support, while goal-reward mechanisms provide stable dopamine secretion. It is reasonable to believe that the combination of these two relationships can play a significant role in the prevention and even treatment of depression. These two stable, controllable things that give the patient purpose and support, which I call anchors, can stabilize the patient's psychological state, and effectively prevent the patient from breaking down. At present, the mainstream psychotherapy

of depression focuses on cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) [9] and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT). The core hypothesis of CBT is that an individual's negative emotions are not caused by a certain life event, but by the interpretation and view of the individual experiencing the event. Cognition is the intermediary between emotion and behavior, and cognition, emotion and behavior interact with each other. So, what the counselor needs to do is correct the cognitive distortions and certain behaviors of the patient. The goal-reward mechanism is perfectly capable of correcting patients' behavior, and at the same time, because patients expect the reward for daily goal achievement, they pay less attention to certain thoughts, thus achieving a certain effect of alleviating cognitive distortion. IPT focuses on solving patients' relationship problems, which can be summarized as lack of relationship, conflict of role, fear of relationship and relationship change. A stable social relationship that can provide people with social support can solve most of the above problems and provide patients with more effective support.

For example, therapists can set mandatory goals for their patients, such as taking a walk for an hour today, bake a cake for themselves, and involve family, friends, or romantic partners in the process. Shifting to the happiness that comes from having a stable relationship with society will help depressed people who are withdrawn and reluctant to get close to others to have more intimate and stable relationships with others.

However, there are some problems with the treatment, which is it is almost useless when it comes to patients with more severe symptoms. If a patient has nothing to like and no interest in all recreational activities, it is difficult to find a reward that will attract him. At the same time, a stable social support is rare. In fact, it is the lack of social support that causes the symptoms of depression in most patients or potential patients, and how to help these patients to establish stable social support is the focus of the future research.

## 5 Some Speculations about Specific Treatments

The first thing that must be done is to assess the patient's social and mental status and determine whether the patient's condition is suitable for the treatment. The treatment is more effective for patients with mild or potential disease. There are two key points to evaluate. One is whether the patient can find a suitable preference that can be used as a reward [10]. If there is at least one thing that appeals to the patient, the patient can try this method. The second is whether the patient has any stable social support, and if not, whether it is feasible to shape a social support for the patient. The treatment will start from two aspects [11]. First, patients will be helped to set goals for their lives, and the rewards for achieving these goals will be clearly listed. These rewards will motivate patients to live harder and provide them with a steady supply of dopamine. The second is the shaping of reliable social support. If the patient has a family, judge whether the patient's family can provide reliable social support for the patient after evaluating the family relationship; if not, then whether the patient has reliable friends who can provide social support for him. If the patient has neither reliable family nor friends, the community can only be used to provide some social support for the patient. However, social support provided by the community is less reliable and has less influence on patients, so the success rate is lower [12]. At the same time, the use of this therapy may lead to dependency, such as

dependence on relationships used as anchors and dependence on rewards, and further studies are needed to assess the probability and harm of dependencies.

## 6 Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that anchors can be used as a completely new therapy to replace most of the functions of CBT and IPT by finding, establishing, and stabilizing anchors for patients, and I even think that this therapy may be better than CBT and IPT. Although there is a limit to how useful this therapy can be in more severe cases, it has a future. However, all of this is speculation for the time being, and future studies need to be supported by more experimental data to determine the feasibility of anchor therapy by observing its actual prevention and treatment effect on depression.

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