Why Optimists Are So Sad

by Denny Watkins October 27, 2011, 04:00 am EDT

Wipe that smile off your face: People who are eternally optimistic are more likely to become depressed, according to a new study in the journal Emotion.

In the study, people who overestimated their abilities on a sample SAT scored as much as 12 points higher on a 24-point psychological scale of depression than people who accurately predicted their test results.

If you see your life as a smooth road to achieving your dreams, you're left completely defenseless once your delusions wear off, which could lead to depression, says study author Young-Hoon Kim, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Pennsylvania. But people who are realistic about their abilities can mentally prepare themselves for the occasional rough patch, Kim explains.

Want to find out if you're deluding yourself? Ask your boss for an informal performance review, and encourage him or her to be candid about whether or not you're meeting expectations. Approach your supervisor well before your office makes decisions about annual pay bumps, so you have time to fix your weak spots.

If your supervisor is full of nothing but good news, it's time for a second opinion. Seek out a peer who will shoot straight with you, Kim advises.

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