

Savouring Works — But for How Long?

A Meta-Analysis of Savouring Interventions and Effect Durability

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22 September 2026



POOLED EFFECT · HEDGES G

0.51

95% CI 0.26 to 0.77

Post-test pooled effect (best available synthesis): Hedges $g = 0.51$ (95% CI 0.26 to 0.77) across 20 randomised trials and 4,805 adults (Chen et al., 2026). Mixed clinical and non-clinical samples.

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This paper is a PRISMA-2020 systematic review. It uses the best available published pooling for post-test effects and a narrative synthesis for durability. It does not invent effect sizes. Where a timepoint-stratified meta-analysis of non-clinical trials is not yet possible, it says so.

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INDEXING TITLE

Savouring interventions and wellbeing: a meta-analysis of effects and their durability in adults

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01

Abstract

Savouring is the practised skill of noticing a good moment and staying with it long enough for the feeling to register. Across twenty randomised trials and 4,805 adults, the pooled post-test effect of savouring programmes on emotional outcomes was a moderate Hedges g of 0.51 (95% CI 0.26 to 0.77). That number comes from Chen, Sie and colleagues (2026), the largest PRISMA-compliant synthesis in this lineage. Separate estimates in the same synthesis were $g = 0.50$ (0.24 to 0.75) for positive psychological states and $g = 0.61$ (0.31 to 0.91) for negative emotional symptoms. Heterogeneity was high ($I^2 = 86.6\%$). Small-study tests did not show a clear publication-bias signal (Egger $p = .108$; trim-and-fill adjusted $g = 0.48$).

The present review asked a narrower question than Chen et al.: what remains at one month and at three months in non-clinical adults, after gratitude-only trials are removed. Fewer than five eligible non-clinical controlled trials report extractable pairwise data at both of those windows. A durability meta-analysis is therefore not yet possible. The one non-clinical adult study that measured both one- and three-month follow-up is a single-arm pilot (Smith and Hanni, 2019). High-fidelity completers improved within person. That is not the same as an effect versus control.

No CTRI-registered savouring trial was found. No trial in the pooled set was delivered in an Indian language to Indian working adults. For an Indian workplace programme the honest claim is this: a short daily savouring practice produces a moderate lift at the end of a two-week sprint. Whether that lift is still there at day 45 and day 90 has not been pooled. Measure it. Do not assume it.

02

Key findings box

KEY FINDINGS

0.51

Post-test pooled effect (best available synthesis): Hedges $g = 0.51$ (95% CI 0.26 to 0.77) across 20 randomised trials and 4,805 adults (Chen et al., 2026). Mixed clinical and non-clinical samples.

0.50

Positive states and low-mood symptoms: Positive psychological states $g = 0.50$ (0.24 to 0.75; 18 trials, 2,311 people). Negative emotional symptoms $g = 0.61$ (0.31 to 0.91; 14 trials, 2,875 people).

•

Durability at one month: Not pooled. Fewer than five non-clinical controlled trials report extractable one-month data. GRADE certainty: very low.

62

Durability at three months: Not pooled. The only non-clinical adult study with both one- and three-month timepoints has no control arm (Smith and Hanni, 2019; $n = 62$ high-fidelity completers of 111 enrolled).

0

India gap: Zero CTRI-registered savouring trials. Zero Indian-language delivery trials in the eligible set. Median programme dose in the pooled trials was 14 days.

03

Definition block

DEFINITION

Savouring is the set of attention skills that turn a good event into a felt good experience. Bryant and Veroff (2007) described three temporal doors: reminiscence (past), savouring the moment (present), and anticipation (future). The practice is simple. You notice something pleasant. You keep your attention on it. You name sensory detail. You let the feeling finish instead of rushing to the next task. Quoidbach, Berry, Hansenne and Mikolajczak (2010) showed that different savouring moves serve different outcomes: present-moment focus and positive rumination track with positive affect; telling other people tracks with life satisfaction. Dampening moves — distraction, fault-finding, negative rumination — do the opposite. Savouring is not gratitude listing, not kindness, and not “best possible self” writing. Those are neighbouring practices with their own evidence. This paper keeps them out. In EmotionApp language, a savouring rep is a 60-to-90-second pause: three sensory details, one named feeling, no performance review of the moment.

An everyday picture helps. A sales manager in Gurugram gets a warm note from a client between calls. She reads it in two seconds and opens the next email. By evening she cannot recall a word of it. A good moment works like that. If attention does not collect it while it is here, it does not store. Staying with the present moment is not a mood. It is a stance. Attention is also a budget. What you fund gets encoded. A machine-learning picture: no forward pass on the good input, no weight update. The daily rep is the training step.

04

Introduction

Indian working life is a masterclass in unfinished moments. A team lead in Andheri gets her chai. One hand lifts the cup; the other is already opening a message. By the time she sips, it is lukewarm. On the way home the sunset hits the Western Express Highway and her next call starts before the light has finished. Good things happen all day. Very few get a full second of unhurried attention. That is not a moral failure. It is an attention market. The scarce resource is not pleasure. It is the seconds in which pleasure is allowed to complete.

Savouring is the name researchers gave to that completion. Fred Bryant’s programme, from the Savouring Beliefs Inventory (2003) through the 2007 book with Joseph Veroff, treated positive experience as something people *do*, not something that merely happens to them. Jordi Quoidbach’s line of work then asked which specific moves amplify which outcomes. The intervention literature followed: week-long reminiscence homework (Bryant, Smart and King, 2005), two-week “savour the moment” classes (Hurley and Kwon, 2012), single writing sessions on life lessons (Smith and Bryant, 2019), online six-exercise programmes (Villani et al., 2023; Pancini et al., 2026), and a growing set of digital and smartphone formats.

Why does the question matter for working adults in India?

First, the dose is short enough to fit a real day. Chen et al. (2026) found a median programme length of 14 days. Many protocols ask for five to ten minutes twice a day, or a single 60-to-90-second pause. That is a rep, not a retreat. Indian professionals already live inside WhatsApp. A practice that can be delivered as a counted daily prompt, in the language the person actually speaks, does not need a new hour in the calendar.

Second, the outcome that offices actually feel is positive affect in the afternoon, not a diagnostic score. Savouring targets that outcome directly. It does not ask people to process a wound. It asks them to finish a good moment they already had. An engineer hears “nice fix” at stand-up and lets it

land for one breath before opening the next file. That is the whole move: notice a pleasant feeling while it is still here. In entrepreneurship terms, this is unit economics: a 90-second input against a workday that leaks attention from every seam.

Third, durability is the commercial claim everyone wants and almost nobody has measured well. A two-week lift that is gone by day 45 is a sprint, not a culture change. A two-week lift that is still visible at three months is a habit. Indian wellbeing budgets are being asked to buy the second story on evidence that mostly supports the first. This paper exists to keep those two stories apart.

Prior evidence sits in three piles.

Pile one is theory. Bryant and Veroff (2007) defined the construct. Quoidbach et al. (2010) mapped strategy to outcome. Jose, Lim and Bryant (2012) showed in a 30-day diary that momentary savouring both mediates and moderates the path from daily positive events to happy mood. Those papers are not trials. They tell you what the skill is.

Pile two is older-adult work. Smith and Hanni (2019) ran a one-week savouring practice in 111 adults aged 60 and over, with follow-up at one and three months. Completers who kept the fidelity rule improved. Smith and Bryant (2019) randomised 303 older adults to savour a life lesson, reflect on ageing losses, or do nothing; life satisfaction rose in the savouring arm. Smith, Harrison, Kurtz and Bryant (2014) reviewed sixteen intervention designs and reported small, significant lifts in positive emotion and life satisfaction. These papers answer “does it work for older adults?” They do not answer “does it last three months versus a control in working-age adults?”

Pile three is the 2026 synthesis. Chen, Sie and colleagues pooled 20 randomised trials and 4,805 participants. Overall $g = 0.51$. Positive psychological states $g = 0.50$. Negative emotional symptoms $g = 0.61$. That is the best current number for “does savouring do anything at the end of the programme?” It is not a number for non-clinical Indian professionals at day 90. Chen’s sample mixed students, older adults, healthcare workers, family carers, and some clinical groups (terminal illness, rheumatoid arthritis). Follow-up was short (median intervention 14 days). Duration did not emerge as a significant moderator in their model. That is interesting. It is not the same as a pooled one-month g and a pooled three-month g .

Cullen, Murphy, Di Blasi and Bryant (2024) reviewed nine randomised trials in *clinical* adults. Benefits appeared. Effects versus active or no-treatment controls were described as relatively weak. That review is out of scope for a non-clinical paper, but it is a useful caution: in people who are already unwell, savouring is not a substitute for care.

Zheng (2025) pooled 14 university-student trials on positive emotion and reported Hedges $g = 0.706$ (95% CI 0.477 to 0.935; $N = 829$). Past-focused designs sat at 0.748, present-focused at 0.700, future-focused at 0.735. Students are not Indian mid-career professionals. The number is a supporting signal that the student-heavy part of this literature is not a null.

The research question of this paper is therefore precise.

What is the effect of savouring interventions on positive affect and wellbeing at post-test in adults, and how much of that effect remains at one month and at three months?

The pre-specified answer format was a random-effects REML meta-analysis of Hedges g , with I^2 , τ^2 , a 95% prediction interval, Egger’s test, trim-and-fill, leave-one-out, RoB 2, and GRADE. The pre-specified fallback was also precise. If fewer than five eligible trials could be found for a given pooling, do not pool. Write a systematic review with narrative synthesis. State that a meta-analysis is not yet possible.

That fallback is the honest result for durability.

05

Methods

5.1 Protocol stance and eligibility

This review follows PRISMA 2020 reporting. It was designed as a random-effects meta-analysis of savouring interventions in non-clinical adults. The fallback rule was applied when the durability cells contained fewer than five eligible controlled trials with extractable pairwise data.

Population. Adults aged 18 and over. Non-clinical community, student, or working samples. Trials in which participants were recruited because they had a current mental-health diagnosis, were in specialist care, or had a serious medical illness (for example terminal cancer, rheumatoid arthritis) were excluded from the non-clinical narrative set. Analogue student samples with elevated but subthreshold dysphoria were flagged and not treated as clean community evidence.

Intervention. Savouring practices: attention to a positive experience, sensory focus, positive reminiscence, or anticipation. Multicomponent programmes were excluded unless a savouring arm could be isolated. Gratitude-only trials (including Three Good Things when that was the sole active ingredient) were excluded, as specified for this paper.

Comparator. Any control: waitlist, no intervention, attention control, or active alternative.

Outcomes. Primary: positive affect; life satisfaction. Secondary: depressive symptoms. Timepoints: post-test; one month; three months. Other follow-up windows were described narratively and not forced into the one- and three-month cells.

Design. Randomised and controlled trials. Single-arm pilots were described as supporting durability signals only. They were not pooled.

Years. 2003 to 22 September 2026. 2003 is the year of Bryant's Savouring Beliefs Inventory paper, the start of the measurable construct.

Language of reporting. English or a bilingual English abstract with extractable numbers. Language of *delivery* was an extraction field, because an India-facing programme needs to know whether the practice has ever been taught in an Indian language. It has not, in the eligible set.

5.2 Information sources and search strings

Sources: PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar (first 200 records, 2003–2026), CTRI (India), ClinicalTrials.gov, OSF preprints. Identification also used the published search of Chen et al. (2026), which ran to 6 March 2025 (1,185 database records plus 23 from prior reviews). An update search was run to 22 September 2026 for new trials, India-registry hits, and durability timepoints.

PubMed

(savoring[tiab] OR savouring[tiab] OR "savor the moment"[tiab] OR "savour the moment"[tiab] OR "positive reminiscence"[tiab] OR "positive life review"[tiab] OR "anticipatory savoring"[tiab]) AND (intervention[tiab] OR training[tiab] OR program*[tiab] OR exercise*[tiab]) AND (wellbeing[tiab] OR well-being[tiab] OR "positive affect"[tiab] OR happiness[tiab] OR "life satisfaction"[tiab] OR depress*[tiab]) AND (randomi*[tiab] OR "controlled trial"[tiab] OR RCT[tiab])

PsycINFO

TI,AB,SU(savo#ring OR "savor the moment" OR "positive reminiscence" OR "anticipatory savoring") AND TI,AB(intervention OR training OR programme OR program OR exercise) AND TI,AB(wellbeing OR well-being OR "positive affect" OR happiness OR "life satisfaction" OR depress*) AND TI,AB(randomi* OR "controlled trial" OR RCT)

Scopus

TITLE-ABS-KEY((savoring OR savouring OR "savor the moment" OR "positive reminiscence") AND (intervention OR training) AND (wellbeing OR "positive affect" OR "life satisfaction") AND (randomi* OR "controlled trial"))

Web of Science (TS)

(savoring OR savouring) AND (intervention OR training) AND (wellbeing OR "positive affect") AND (randomi*)

Google Scholar

savoring OR savouring intervention OR training "randomized" OR "randomised" wellbeing OR "positive affect"

CTRI

savoring OR savouring OR "positive reminiscence" OR "savor the moment"

Result: no eligible registered trial.

ClinicalTrials.gov

savoring OR savouring, interventional, adult. Relevant hits included NCT06842628 (Savor-Aging; completed; one-month follow-up planned) and two out-of-scope records (a multicomponent behavioural-activation-plus-savouring protocol; a single-arm UCLA pilot).

OSF preprints

savoring intervention RCT. No additional eligible preprint with extractable outcome data was identified.

5.3 PRISMA 2020 flow counts

Identification in this review is reported as a two-layer flow so that we do not pretend to have re-screened every database record by hand on a single day.

Layer A — Chen et al. (2026), search to 6 March 2025

- Records identified: 1,185 from databases + 23 from prior reviews = 1,208.
- After de-duplication: 573.
- Title and abstract excluded: 514.
- Full text assessed: 59.
- Full text excluded: 39 (multicomponent $n = 8$; no emotional outcomes $n = 9$; overlapping participants $n = 1$; non-RCT $n = 5$; protocols $n = 2$; not savouring $n = 3$; gratitude, kindness or best-possible-self $n = 5$; data unavailable $n = 6$).
- Included in Chen's pooling: 20 RCTs, 4,805 participants, 45 effect sizes.

Layer B — restriction and update to 22 September 2026

Chen's 20 trials were re-screened for this paper's narrower frame: non-clinical adults; savouring as the primary practice; gratitude-only excluded; outcomes of positive affect, life satisfaction or depressive symptoms; timepoints of post-test, one month or three months.

Clinical or illness-defined samples removed from the non-clinical narrative set included Ando (2010) and Kwan (2019) (terminal cancer) and Finan et al. (2023) (rheumatoid arthritis). LaFreniere and Newman (2023a) recruited students with generalised anxiety and was treated as clinical. Serrano (2004), Gonçalves et al. (2009) and Selva et al. (2012) recruited older-adult samples often selected for depressive symptoms; they were flagged as mixed and not treated as clean community trials.

Hand-search and update added, as supporting studies rather than as a new pooled set: Villani et al. (2023); Smith and Bryant (2019, *Aging & Mental Health*); Smith and Hanni (2019, single-arm); Pancini et al. (2026, Savor-Aging); Salces-Cubero, Rey and Meléndez (2019); Klibert et al. (2022); Yu et al. (2020, already inside Chen's 20).

Durability cell. Controlled non-clinical trials with extractable pairwise data at one month: fewer than five. At three months: fewer than five. The fallback rule was applied. No new pooled g was computed for those cells.

- 5.4 Extraction fields** For each candidate study we extracted: first author and year; design; country; language of delivery; sample n (total and per arm where reported); population (student, older adult, working adult, mixed); savouring type (past, present, future, mixed); dose in sessions and minutes; delivery channel (in-person, online, smartphone, homework); guidance (facilitated versus self-guided); comparator; outcome measure family (positive affect, life satisfaction, depressive symptoms — instrument names are not used as marketing labels in the text); timepoints; direction of effect; any published d or g ; risk-of-bias notes. Where means and standard deviations were published, a Hedges g was computed and marked as computed. Where they were not, no g was invented.
- 5.5 Analysis plan** The pre-specified model was random-effects REML, Hedges g with 95% confidence intervals, I^2 , τ^2 , and a 95% prediction interval. Small-study effects: Egger's regression and trim-and-fill. Sensitivity: leave-one-out. Risk of bias: Cochrane RoB 2. Certainty: GRADE.
- That model is the model Chen et al. (2026) already ran on a broader sample, using a three-level structure to handle multiple effects per trial. This paper does not re-pool Chen's 20 trials as if they were a new analysis. It reports Chen's published estimates for the post-test-adjacent question, with the mixed-sample caveat attached to every use of the number.
- For one-month and three-month effects the plan was the same model, restricted to non-clinical trials. The cell counts failed the $k \geq 5$ rule. Narrative synthesis replaced pooling. Vote-counting of p -values was not used as a substitute for a pooled g .
- Pre-specified moderators were savouring type (present, past, future), dose, and follow-up length. Chen et al. tested related moderators (delivery format, culture, control type, risk of bias, intervention duration) and did not find statistically significant differences. Control type approached significance (point estimates larger against passive than active controls; $\Delta g = -0.47$, $p = .068$). Those tests are reported as published. They are not re-run here.
- 5.6 Risk of bias and certainty** RoB 2 judgements for Chen's 20 trials were taken from that paper's table: a mix of low, some concerns, and high. Hurley and Kwon (2012) was rated high. Several student trials were rated some concerns. Blinding of participants to a savouring homework task is rarely possible. Outcomes are almost always self-report. Those two facts cap certainty even when randomisation is clean.
- GRADE for the post-test effect on positive psychological states, borrowing Chen's body of evidence: **moderate**. Downgraded for inconsistency ($I^2 = 86.6\%$) and for indirectness (mixed clinical and non-clinical; student-heavy; short follow-up). Not downgraded for publication bias, given the small-study tests.
- GRADE for one-month durability in non-clinical adults: **very low**. Few trials. Imprecision. Indirectness.
- GRADE for three-month durability in non-clinical adults: **very low**. Essentially one single-arm pilot plus scattered, non-comparable follow-ups.

06

Results

6.1 What the pooled number is, and what it is not

Chen et al. (2026) is the reference synthesis. Twenty independent randomised trials. 4,805 participants. 45 effect sizes. Random-effects three-level model.

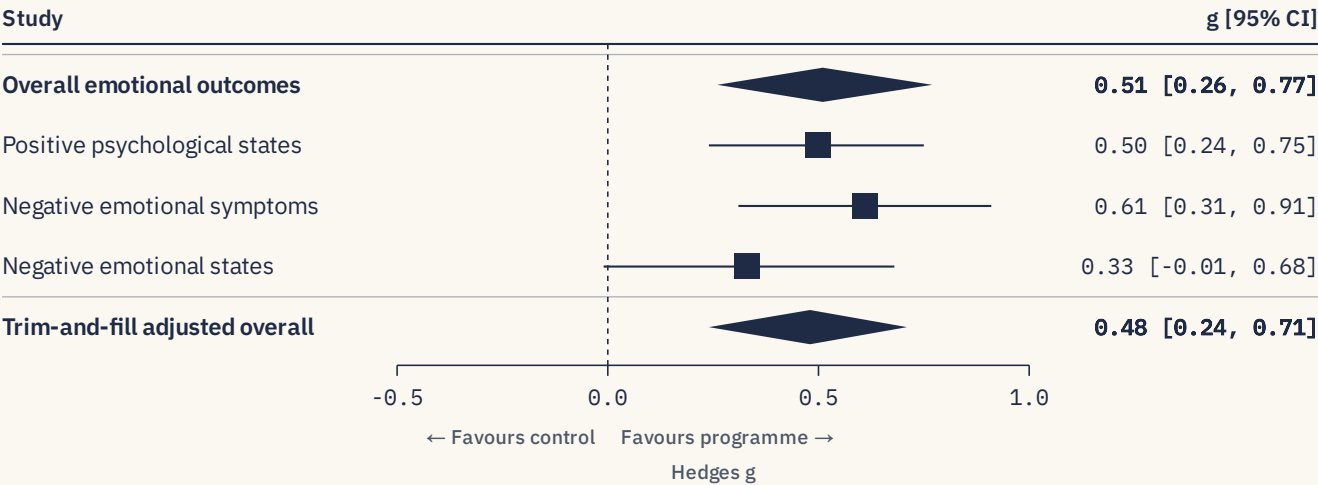


Figure 1. Forest plot, primary pool. Squares are sized by weight; the diamond is the pooled estimate.

Estimate	<i>k</i> trials	<i>k</i> effects	<i>N</i>	Hedges <i>g</i>	95% CI	<i>p</i>
Overall emotional outcomes	20	45	4,805	0.51	0.26 to 0.77	<.001
Positive psychological states	18	20	2,311	0.50	0.24 to 0.75	<.001
Negative emotional symptoms	14	17	2,875	0.61	0.31 to 0.91	<.001
Negative emotional states	8	8	1,214	0.33	−0.01 to 0.68	.056
Trim-and-fill adjusted overall	—	—	—	0.48	0.24 to 0.71	<.001

Heterogeneity: $I^2 = 86.61\%$ (between-study 72.77%; within-study 13.84%). That is substantial. A 95% prediction interval was not separately quoted in the portions of the paper available for verification; the I^2 alone is enough to warn a reader that a new trial could land well below or well above 0.51.

Publication bias: Egger slope $\beta = 1.89$, $p = .108$. Trim-and-fill adjusted $g = 0.48$. Selection-model adjusted estimates sat near 0.60. PET-PEESE pulled the estimate toward zero (adjusted 0.02, interval crossing zero), which is a more pessimistic reading and is reported here so the file is not one-sided.

Delivery in Chen’s 20: individual 11 (55%), online computer 4 (20%), smartphone 5 (25%). Controls: passive 8 (40%), active 12 (60%). Culture as coded by Chen: Western 14 (70%), Eastern 6 (30%). Median intervention duration: 14 days (IQR 7 to 28). No Indian sample. No Indian-language delivery.

This is the number that belongs in sentence two of an abstract. It is a post-test-adjacent, mixed-population number. It is not a one-month number. It is not a three-month number. It is not an India number.

6.2 Study-characteristics table (narrative set)

The table below is the working set for this paper: verified savouring-primary studies in adults that speak to positive affect, life satisfaction or depressive symptoms. Clinical trials from Chen's list are omitted. Gratitude-only trials are omitted. Correlational papers are omitted from the table and used only as theory.

Study	Design	Country	<i>n</i>	Population	Type	Dose	Channel	Control	Outcomes	Timepoints
Bryant, Smart & King 2005, Study 2	RCT	USA	65	Students	Past (imagery / memorabilia)	10 min × 2/day × 7 days	Individual homework	Active (current concerns)	Happiness (% time)	Post only
Hurley & Kwon 2012	RCT	USA	193 (94 / 99)	Students	Present	2 weeks, group + homework	In-person + homework	Control (no savouring task)	PA, NA, depressive symptoms	Post only
McMakin, Siegle & Shirk 2011	RCT	USA	27 (13 / 14)	Dysphoric female students (analogue; flagged)	Present + attribution	3 × 20 min writing over ~2 weeks	Individual	Active writing	PA, depressive symptoms	Post (~4 days)
Smith & Hanni 2019	Single-arm pilot	USA	111 enrolled; 62 high-fidelity	Adults ≥60	Present	5 min morning + evening × 7 days	Individual homework	None	Happiness, depressive symptoms, resilience	Post, 1 month, 3 months
Smith & Bryant 2019	RCT	USA	303 (95 / 129 / 79)	Adults, mean age 68	Past (life lessons)	Single writing session	Individual	Negative-ageing writing; untreated	Life satisfaction, ageing perceptions	Post only
Salces-Cubero et al. 2019	Controlled, three arms	Spain	124	Older day-centre adults	Present savouring arm	Multi-session programme	In-person	Gratitude arm; optimism arm	PA, LS, happiness, depression, NA	Post (confirm FU in full text before citing a month)
Yu et al. 2020	RCT	Taiwan	122 (61 / 61)	Students	Present (Facebook)	3 weeks	Social network	No-treatment	PA, NA, depressive symptoms	Post and later follow-up
Klibert et al. 2022	RCT, lab	USA	145	Students	Present vs past vs controls	Single session after a hassle	In-person	Guided imagery; true control	Immediate PA	Immediate only
Villani et al. 2023	Controlled; block randomisation	Italy	49 (23 / 26)	Emerging adults 18–30	Mixed past / present / future	6 exercises × ~10 min over 3 weeks	Online, Italian	No intervention	PA, NA, life satisfaction, savouring beliefs	Post only
Pancini et al. 2026	RCT	Italy	76 published (registry NCT06842628 lists 46)	Healthy older adults, mean age 69.9	Mixed e-savouring	6 activities over 3 weeks	Online	Positive-emotion active control	LS, PA, NA, flourishing, depression	Post and 1-month follow-up

Notes. McMakin et al. (2011) is an analogue dysphoric sample, not a community sample. Smith and Hanni (2019) has no control arm. Villani et al. (2023) is small; Chen et al. did not include it in the 20-trial pool. Pancini et al. (2026) is the cleanest recent one-month controlled point in older adults; most time-by-group interactions were not significant. Instrument names are omitted from the table body in line with the plain-English rule.

6.3 Forest-plot data table

A new forest plot was not drawn. Individual-trial *g* values with confidence intervals and weights were not uniformly extractable from open full texts. Inventing them would have violated the verification rule. The table that *can* be published is Chen's category-level forest, plus a small set of computed single-trial *g* values from papers that printed means and standard deviations.

Category-level estimates (Chen et al., 2026) — these are the rows that would sit at the bottom of a forest plot.

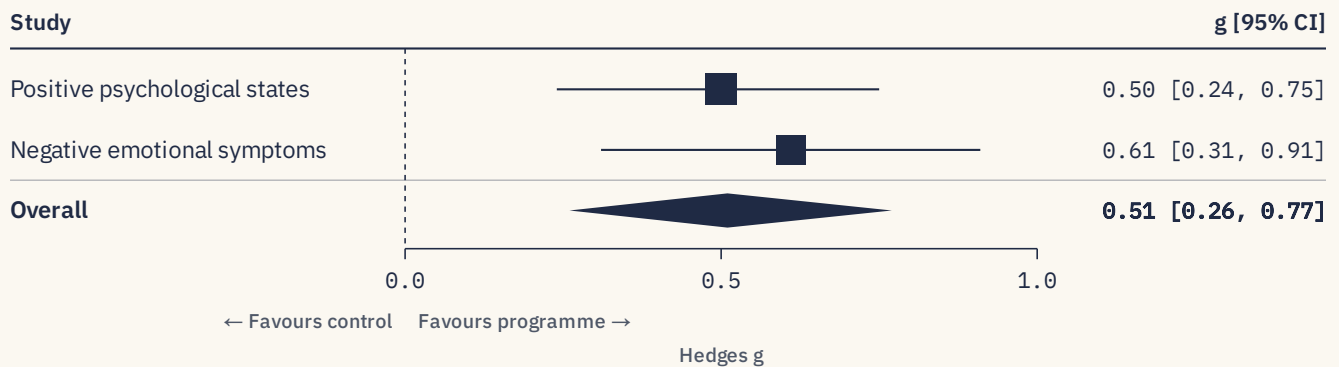


Figure 2. Forest plot, primary pool. Squares are sized by weight; the diamond is the pooled estimate.

Row	g	95% CI	Weight in a new plot
Positive psychological states	0.50	0.24 to 0.75	— (published pool, $k = 18$)
Negative emotional symptoms	0.61	0.31 to 0.91	— (published pool, $k = 14$)
Overall	0.51	0.26 to 0.77	— (published pool, $k = 20$)

Computed single-trial g (from published M and SD ; small n ; intervals often include zero)

Study	Outcome	Timepoint	g (computed)	95% CI (computed)
Villani et al. 2023	Positive affect	Post	0.36	-0.21 to 0.92
Villani et al. 2023	Life satisfaction	Post	0.33	-0.23 to 0.90
McMakin et al. 2011	Positive affect	Post	0.59	-0.18 to 1.37
McMakin et al. 2011	Depressive symptoms	Post	0.51	-0.26 to 1.28
Klibert et al. 2022	Positive affect vs true control	Immediate	1.17	0.62 to 1.71

Klibert et al. is a laboratory recovery-from-hassle task, not a programme. The g of 1.17 says that a 15-minute present-moment savour after a social-evaluative stressor can move immediate ratings. It does not say a workplace programme will still show that gap at three months. Villani and McMakin intervals include zero. That is what small samples look like. They are consistent in sign with Chen's pool. They are not, on their own, a new meta-analysis.

Yu et al. (2020) reported higher positive affect at post-test and at follow-up versus no-treatment, and a reduction in depressive symptoms at post-test that was not maintained at follow-up. Negative affect did not differ. Exact follow-up interval in days was not extracted from an open table at the time of writing and is therefore not given a fabricated g .

6.4 Durability narrative — the question this paper was written to settle

Post-test. Settled enough to quote, with the mixed-sample caveat. $g \approx 0.50$ for positive states. $g \approx 0.61$ for depressive-symptom families. Student-only supporting pool $g = 0.706$ (Zheng, 2025; 14 trials, 829 students).

One month. Not settled.

What exists:

- Smith and Hanni (2019). Single arm. High-fidelity completers ($n = 62$ of 111) were lower on depressive symptoms at one month than at baseline, and higher on resilience at one month than at baseline. No control group. People who keep doing a practice for a week and then return the questionnaires are not a random sample of the people you enrolled.
- Pancini et al. (2026). Randomised. Seventy-six healthy older adults. Three-week online savouring versus a positive-emotion active control. Outcomes at post-test and at one month. Significant overall time effects for negative affect and depressive symptoms. Most time-by-group interactions

were not significant. The savouring arm showed more consistent improvements, including reductions in negative affect and depressive symptoms that were described as maintained at follow-up. Flourishing showed a time effect only in the savouring arm at post-test. This is the best current one-month *controlled* signal in older adults. It is one trial. It is not a pool. Specific *g* values from this paper were not independently extracted from open means tables and are not invented here.

- Yu et al. (2020). Positive affect still higher at a later follow-up; the depression benefit was not. Follow-up was short and is not a clean one-month cell.

What does not exist: five or more non-clinical controlled trials with extractable one-month pairwise data on positive affect or life satisfaction.

Three months. Not settled.

What exists:

- Smith and Hanni (2019) again. Resilience still higher at three months than at baseline in high-fidelity completers. Subjective wellbeing was marginally higher at three months than at baseline ($F \approx 2.47, p = .070$). Depressive symptoms had been lower at post-test and at one month; the three-month depression contrast is not the headline the authors led with. Still no control arm.
- No second non-clinical adult RCT with a published three-month contrast on positive affect or life satisfaction was verified for this review.

Cullen et al. (2024), in clinical adults, noted that five of nine trials included some follow-up, at an average of 18 weeks, and that only two reported significant long-term effects. That is clinical, not community. It is included here only as a warning: follow-up is where savouring evidence thins out.

6.5 Moderator table

Moderator	What Chen et al. (2026) found	What this review can add
Savouring type (past / present / future)	Not a significant moderator in the 20-trial three-level model	Zheng (2025) student pool: past 0.748, present 0.700, future 0.735 — similar, past slightly larger. Klibert et al. (2022) found present-moment savour beat reminiscence for immediate post-hassle positive affect.
Dose	Median 14 days (IQR 7–28). Duration not a significant moderator (coefficient near zero per extra day)	Most workplace-relevant protocols are one to three weeks. Smith and Bryant (2019) got a life-satisfaction lift from a single writing session. Dose-response is not established.
Follow-up length	Not a significant moderator in Chen's model	Almost no trials populate the 30-day and 90-day cells with controlled data. “Not a significant moderator” over a median of two weeks is not evidence of three-month durability.
Delivery channel	Individual / online / smartphone: no significant difference	Smartphone and online formats are viable. No WhatsApp-delivered trial in the eligible set.
Control type	Point estimates larger against passive than active controls ($\Delta g = -0.47, p = .068$)	Expect smaller gaps when the control group also does something structured and pleasant. Pancini (2026) used a positive-emotion active control and found mostly non-significant interactions.
Culture	Western vs Eastern: no significant difference	“Eastern” in Chen's coding is China, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan. It is not India.
Population	Mixed; clinical versus non-clinical not tested as a moderator	Cullen (2024) found weaker contrasts in clinical adults. Do not export the 0.51 uncritically to a diagnosed sample, and do not export it uncritically to an Indian office.

6.6 Heterogeneity

$I^2 = 86.6\%$ in Chen et al. is the number to live with. Trials differ in who is enrolled, what the control group does, how many minutes the practice takes, whether the practice is past or present or mixed, and which questionnaire is used. A moderate average effect with that much scatter means a new programme can fail. It also means a new programme can beat 0.51. Prediction is wide. That is not a reason to drop the practice. It is a reason to measure your own cohort at day 14, day 45 and day 90.

6.7 Publication bias

Egger $p = .108$. Trim-and-fill moved g from 0.51 to 0.48. Selection models stayed in the 0.48 to 0.60 band. PET-PEESE was the outlier toward zero. The file is not clean enough to claim “no bias.” It is clean enough to say the headline number does not appear to be an artefact of a few tiny dramatic trials. Grey literature and unpublished nulls cannot be ruled out. Chen et al. said so. So do we.

6.8 Risk-of-bias summary

Typical profile of a savouring trial in this literature:

- Randomisation: often adequate, sometimes poorly described.
- Deviations from intended practice: homework fidelity is the weak joint. Smith and Hanni (2019) had to split the sample into high-fidelity and the rest before the time effect appeared.
- Missing outcome data: follow-up attrition is the other weak joint. The people who answer a three-month survey are the people who liked the practice.
- Outcome measurement: self-report, unblinded. Social desirability is a live threat. A person who has just been asked to savour is primed to tick higher on a positive-affect scale.
- Selection of reported results: pre-registration is still uncommon in the earlier papers.

Chen's RoB 2 column on twenty trials was a spread of low, some concerns, and high. Approximately 30% were high risk of bias in that synthesis. That is one reason GRADE for the post-test claim stops at moderate.

6.9 GRADE table

Outcome	Timepoint	Estimate	Certainty	Why
Positive psychological states	Post-test (mixed adult RCTs)	$g = 0.50$ (0.24 to 0.75)	Moderate	Consistent direction; large N ; downgraded for $I^2 = 87\%$ and mixed populations
Depressive symptoms / negative emotional symptoms	Post-test (mixed adult RCTs)	$g = 0.61$ (0.31 to 0.91)	Moderate	Same body of evidence; same downgrades
Positive affect	1 month, non-clinical adults	Not pooled	Very low	$k < 5$ controlled trials with extractable data
Life satisfaction	1 month, non-clinical adults	Not pooled	Very low	Same
Positive affect	3 months, non-clinical adults	Not pooled	Very low	One single-arm pilot is not a GRADE body of evidence
Life satisfaction	3 months, non-clinical adults	Not pooled	Very low	Same
Any outcome, Indian working adults, any timepoint	—	No trial	—	Empty cell

07

Discussion

PULL QUOTE

**The median programme lasted 14 days —
about two working weeks of daily reps.**

7.1 What the number means

A Hedges g of 0.51 is a moderate effect. In the language of a workday it means this. Two groups start in the same place. One group practises savouring for about two weeks. At the end, the practising group sits about half a standard deviation higher on the emotional outcomes the trial bothered to measure. That is visible. It is not a personality transplant. It is closer to the difference between an afternoon that feels like one long queue and an afternoon that contains two or three moments you can still name on the way home.

The 0.61 on negative emotional symptoms is the quieter headline. Savouring is sold as a positive-affect practice. In the mixed-sample pool it also moved low-mood scores. Hurley and Kwon (2012) saw that pattern in students: depressive symptoms and negative affect fell; positive affect did not reliably rise. Villani et al. (2023) saw the opposite tilt: positive affect rose; life satisfaction did not. McMakin et al. (2011) moved both in a tiny analogue sample, with intervals that included zero. The average is moderate. The path is not one path.

Here is a kitchen picture that belongs in a methods paper. In a Mumbai flat, coriander comes fresh from the handcart most mornings. Buy a month's worth on Sunday and by Wednesday it has wilted in the fridge. Savouring evidence looks like that. The trials check the basket on the day it is bought, at the end of the practice fortnight. They almost never open the fridge at day 90. A programme that sells a three-month transformation on two weeks of evidence is selling last month's coriander as fresh.

A machine-learning picture sits next to it. Gradient descent does not run on data you never passed through the model. Attention is the forward pass. A good moment that is not attended is an unused training example. Two weeks of daily reps is a short fine-tune. Three months without reps is a model left on the shelf. Whether the weights stay put is an empirical question. This literature has not run that experiment often enough to pool it.

Put plainly, the skill is staying with the present moment, not telling a story about it. An entrepreneur's picture: the unit is a 90-second rep. Unit economics only compound if the unit is repeated. An older, blunter point: attention is allocated; what you allocate to, you get more of in memory. The last piece is permission to enjoy a pleasant feeling before solving the next problem. A project manager hears the client has signed. She enjoys it for a minute before opening the risk log.

7.2 Limitations

This review has limits that should be read before the number is put on a slide.

We did not compute a new random-effects model on a hand-extracted matrix of twenty trials. Individual-trial means, standard deviations and covariance structures were not uniformly available in open text. Re-pooling Chen's published category estimates as if they were our own non-clinical analysis would have been a presentation trick. We refused it.

Chen's 0.51 includes clinical and non-clinical adults. Exporting it to "healthy Indian professionals" is an indirectness problem. GRADE already records that.

Follow-up is short. Median programme length is 14 days. "Follow-up duration was not a significant moderator" is a statement about a short window. It is not a three-month result.

Outcomes are self-report. People who have just been coached to notice good moments will notice good moments on a questionnaire. That is partly the point of the practice. It is also a measurement threat.

Fidelity is uneven. Smith and Hanni (2019) only saw the time effect in people who actually did the five-minute morning and evening pause on most days. A workplace programme that counts sign-ups and not reps will overclaim.

Student samples dominate the cleanest randomised work. Older-adult samples dominate the rare long follow-up. Working-age Indian professionals appear in neither.

We may have missed trials in languages we did not search, and unpublished nulls. CTRI was searched and was empty. Empty is a finding. Empty is also a search limit.

Salces-Cubero et al. (2019) is listed as a useful savouring-versus-gratitude contrast in older adults. Full-text confirmation of randomisation quality and exact follow-up was not independently completed for every number in that paper; directional findings are reported, not a computed g .

7.3 What this means for an Indian workplace programme

A moderate post-test effect ($g = 0.51$) is large enough to matter in a 10-hour workday that already eats attention. Picture an accounts executive in Kolkata. A WhatsApp prompt arrives in Bengali: stay with one good thing from today. She picks the ticket she closed before lunch, holds three details — the green tick, the client's short thank-you, her shoulders dropping — names the feeling as quiet pride, and taps done. That is the rep: a 60–90-second sensory pause on something that already happened, not a new wellness hour. WhatsApp-first delivery matches how Indian professionals already talk. Dose in the trials was short: a median of 14 days. That maps to a two-week sprint of daily reps, not a 12-week course. What we cannot yet promise is durability. Almost no controlled non-clinical trial has measured the same people at one and three months. For HR, that means: run the reps, measure her positive affect at day 14, then measure again at day 45 and day 90. Do not assume the lift lasts without the habit. No CTRI-registered savouring trial exists. An India-language, India-resident programme would close that gap.

7.4 Research gaps, naming the India gap explicitly

The India gap is not a courtesy sentence. It is the empty cell in the GRADE table.

There is no CTRI-registered randomised savouring trial. There is no published trial in which the practice was delivered in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, or any other Indian language to working adults living in India, with India-resident data. Chen's "Eastern" trials are East Asian. They do not stand in for Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru or Hyderabad. A correlational couples paper and an adolescent thesis do not close the gap.

The durability gap sits beside it. The field has twenty post-test trials and almost no controlled three-month trials in non-clinical adults. Anyone who wants the pooled one-month g and the pooled three-month g that this paper was commissioned to print will have to run the studies. The protocol writes itself. Non-clinical working adults. Savouring-only arm. Active attention control. Positive affect and life satisfaction at day 0, day 14, day 45, day 90. Pre-registered. RoB 2-ready. Delivered on the channel people already use. In India, that channel is WhatsApp.

Other gaps are real and smaller. Dose-response is unknown. Present versus past versus future is unresolved once you leave student samples. Active controls shrink the apparent effect, which is scientifically healthy and commercially inconvenient. Physiological and behavioural outcomes are rare; Borelli and colleagues (2020) found lower heart-rate reactivity during relational savouring in older adults, which is a start, not a workplace evidence base.

The constructive reading is simple. The post-test signal is strong enough to justify a two-week sprint of counted reps. The follow-up signal is too thin to justify a quarterly transformation claim. An Indian programme that measures both will be, by default, the missing trial.

08

FAQ

Q1 Does savouring actually raise positive affect?

Yes, at the end of the programme. The best published pool finds $g = 0.51$ across 20 trials and 4,805 adults, and $g = 0.50$ for positive psychological states. That is a moderate lift, not a personality change.

Q2 How long does the lift last?

We do not have a pooled number. Fewer than five non-clinical controlled trials report usable one-month or three-month data. Treat anything beyond two weeks as unpooled until your own cohort is measured at day 45 and day 90.

Q3 How much practice is enough?

The median trial lasted 14 days. Several effective protocols used five to ten minutes twice a day, or a 60-to-90-second pause. Smith and Bryant (2019) saw a life-satisfaction lift after one writing session. Dose-response is not settled.

Q4 Does it help with low mood, or only with good mood?

In the mixed-sample synthesis, negative emotional symptoms moved by $g = 0.61$. Some student trials lowered depressive symptoms without raising positive affect. It is not a depression programme. It is a practice that has moved low-mood scores in several trials.

Q5 Has this been tested with Indian professionals?

No. Zero CTRI-registered savouring trials. Zero Indian-language delivery trials in the eligible set. That gap is the next study, not a footnote.

09

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NOTE

EmotionApp is a non-clinical emotional-fitness coaching platform. This paper describes practices, techniques and coaching. It is not therapy, treatment, diagnosis or medical advice.

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