

The Journey of Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future

1 17th-19th c.: A medical supervillain

Nostalgia was once seen as a disease ("homesickness") by doctors and in medical literature. It was most often associated with soldiers sent off to war, and a diagnosis of nostalgia was the only reason a soldier could be granted leave.

3 Present day: The feel-good force

Researchers have found that personal nostalgia offers important individual benefits. Looking back helps people find meaning and positivity in the past, bringing comfort during times of distress. In short, nostalgia both enhances and restores psychological wellbeing.

5 2025-2028: A relationship superhero?

Our 3.5-year ESRC-funded project moves beyond personal nostalgia to explore shared nostalgia in romantic relationships. Working with charities and practitioners, we examine whether, when, and why revisiting a shared past can strengthen the present and future, ultimately helping couples remain resilient in the face of relational challenges.

2 Late 20th c.: Rehabilitation

Researchers granted nostalgia a distinct conceptual status from homesickness. It came to be understood — and is still regarded today — as an emotion: "a sentimental longing for the past" or "an affectionate feeling you have for the past, especially for a particularly happy time" (Oxford English Dictionary; Collins English Dictionary).

4 Present day: Missing half the story

Most research to date has investigated nostalgia as a personal emotion, overlooking its social side — how it centres on relationships, arises in conversation, and generates a wide range of pro-social sentiments, motives, and behaviours.

To find out more about our project and opportunities to get involved, visit www.shareproject.net



couples@surrey.ac.uk