

## Optimists able to switch off negative thoughts

Written by Mark Underwood  
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Have you ever wondered how some people manage to be in a good mood all the time? What is it that they know that you don't about seeing the glass as "half full" instead of "half empty?"

Many people work at getting physically fit, but not everyone practices "mental fitness." Many don't consciously know how to keep a positive attitude going in spite of problems we all come up against.

So what are these happy thinkers doing that many people are not? Let's start with lifestyle. No matter where you live or what chapter of your life you're in, it's easy to get the doldrums from time to time. In some parts of the country winter blahs are blamed while others lead an overly scheduled lifestyle which brings on daily challenges.

Research has found that the difference between people who remain cheery when faced with challenges that life doles out and those who can't switch off negative thoughts, is the difference in mindsets.

David Snowdon, a professor of neurology at the University of Kentucky has said that when optimists face problems they are able to "switch off" negative thoughts and "switch on" a happy state of mind.

### Health Benefits for Optimists

Optimism is good for you health, pessimism is not. Stress can be harmful, yet it is nearly impossible to avoid. As we age, the effects of stress take a greater toll on our health, from increasing cholesterol to disrupting sleep.

Individuals that turn a difficult situation into a workable solution may actually be protecting themselves from the harmful effects of stress and other health problems.

A 2011 Harvard School of Public Health study found a significant increase of risk for various health problems including heart disease in people with negative outlooks.

Studies have also shown that people who can see humor in difficult situations where others see only anxiety and failure benefit from keeping a light-hearted outlook.

### Living life like the way you want

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There are various degrees and forms of negative thinking, but results are often the same. It can destroy motivation and energy, concentration skills, and feelings of self-worth. For some people, they've lived for years with a constant lack of positive thoughts. Instead, they have replaced them with continual negativity.

Living like this is difficult especially if you do so every day of the week. Negative thoughts may make you want to avoid deadlines and responsibilities. You put off daily tasks like cooking and cleaning and feel like not going to school and work.

### Tips for Ramping up Positive Thinking

It's one thing to say you want a positive attitude, but it's another thing to practice optimistic thinking when times are tough. How do you go from complaining to having a sunny disposition?

Like most things, the more you practice the better at it you get. Open the door to being more enthusiastic about life. The more you consciously put positive thoughts in your head, the more intuitive it will get.

Positivity may be easier than you think because you can practice it anywhere, anytime without any special equipment or training. Use these tips to start being a new you.

- Listen for negativity: Find one place in your daily routine where you often run into negativity. Listen for your internal voice emerging that is looking at troubling news as failure. Ignore it. Change the channel and find a new internal voice that says, "I will get through this and in the meantime, I'm grateful for what I have." Do this daily.
- Learn to laugh: Laughter is one of the most enjoyable ways to let the day's stressors melt away. Humor has been studied extensively for its major effect on our well-being. As social beings we thrive with positive contact with others. Make sure you have people in your life that make you laugh and can help you lighten the day. Positive people are contagious.
- Do something nice (and unexpected) for someone. Research studies have found that five good deeds a day can make you happier. Look for ways to go out of your way to be kind to someone. It could be something simple like opening a door for a shopper whose hands are full or signing up to be a volunteer at a local organization that gives back to the community.
- Exercise for mind and body. If you feel fit and healthy, you're much more likely to want to feel up beat less and less likely to wallow in everyday problems. Exercise has a profound effect on our ability to cope with stress. Exercise elevates our moods and helps fuel positive thinking.

Positive thinking is about placing your mind in readiness to find the good and upbeat in negative situations. It is not just window dressing for a problem—it is a technique as well as a lifestyle that can potentially change your life for the better.

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*Prevagen. Mark has been taped as an expert in the field of neuroscience for The Wall Street Journal Morning Radio, CBS and CNN Radio among others. Mark is also a contributor to the "Brain Health Guide" which highlights the research at Quincy Bioscience and offers practical tips to help keep healthy brain function in aging. More information can be found at: [www.quincybioscience.com](http://www.quincybioscience.com)*