

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

Several studies show that a positive outlook makes for better health, happiness and productivity.

According to researchers at the Mayo Clinic, some of the health benefits positive thinking may provide include:

- An increased lifespan
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

It's not clear why positive thinkers experience these benefits, but one theory is that having a positive outlook equips you to cope better with stressful situations, which in turn reduces the harmful health effects of stress on the body. It's also possible that those predisposed to positivity tend to make healthier choices — they get more exercise, follow a healthier diet, and don't smoke or drink alcohol in excess.

SWITCHING TO POSITIVITY

Just how, then, do you become an optimist? Martin Seligman, an expert in positive psychology, believes people can turn pessimistic thoughts around with simple strategies. His research shows that people can transform pessimistic habits into positive ones through everyday techniques.

Try this two-step approach to train your brain to focus on the positive:

- 01** | Identify and stop negative self-talk in its tracks
- 02** | Grasp something positive, and keep coming back to this positive thought.

By practicing these steps, you can retrain your brain to have a positive focus.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

The ability to bounce back from or adapt to stressful or negative situations and losses is key to protecting your positivity. Experts recommend these key ways to build your resilience:

- **Boost your network:** Maintain good relationships with family and friends
- **Be prepared for change,** and accept that it's part of life
- **Be in control:** Take action to resolve problems rather than just hoping they will disappear or waiting for them to resolve themselves.



BRAIN EXERCISE

Developing a healthy mindset involves not only nurturing a positive attitude, but also exercising the brain itself. Regularly exercising your brain with mentally stimulating activities is associated with better brain function (thinking skills and memory), as well as a reduced risk of age-related cognitive decline.

The activities with the most brain-boosting impact are those that require you to work outside your comfort zone. Push yourself beyond your boundaries with these tips:

- Be a lifelong learner: Through the process of learning, you create new neural connections, increasing your brain reserve
- Be open: New experiences challenge you to see the world differently
- Try crosswords or other puzzles:
- Attend lectures or enrol in classes to discover new
- Read different genres of books, newspapers or magazines
- Try your hand at writing poetry, painting, playing
- Find a volunteer position that allows you to meet new
- Join a social club or do community work. Social isolation

'I think of positive emotions as nutrients. In the same way that we need to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables to be healthy, we need a variety of positive emotions in our daily experience to help us become more resourceful versions of ourselves,' says social psychologist Professor Barbara Fredrickson, who has spent the last 25 years researching human emotions.

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