

POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

Is your glass half empty or half full? How you answer this question may reflect your outlook on life, your attitude towards yourself, and whether you're optimistic or pessimistic – and it may even affect your health. Positive thinking doesn't mean you ignore life's less present situations, but you approach the unpleasantness in a more positive way. Positive thinking often starts with self-talk, which is the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head.

• THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF POSITIVE THINKING

Although it's unclear why people who engage in positive thinking experience these health benefits, one theory is that having a positive outlook enables you to cope better with stressful situations, which reduces the harmful health effects of stress on your body. Health benefits that positive thinking may provide include:

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress and pain
- Greater resistance to illnesses
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease and stroke
- Reduced risk of death from cancer, respiratory conditions, and/or, infections
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

• IDENTIFYING NEGATIVE THINKING

Not sure if your self-talk is positive or negative? Some common forms of negative self-talk include:

- **Filtering** - you magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all the positive ones.
- **Personalizing** - when something bad happens, you immediately blame yourself.
- **Catastrophizing** - you automatically anticipate the worst.
- **Blaming** - You try to say someone else is responsible for what happened to you instead of yourself. You avoid being responsible for your thoughts and feelings.
- **Saying you "should" do something** - You think of all the things you think you should do and blame yourself for not doing them.
- **Magnifying**. You make a big deal out of minor problems.
- **Perfectionism**. Keeping impossible standards and trying to be more perfect sets yourself up for failure.
- **Polarizing**. You see things only as either good or bad. There is no middle ground.

• FOCUS ON POSITIVE THINKING

You can learn to turn negative thinking into positive thinking. The process is simple, but it does take time and practice – you're creating a new habit. Here are some ways you can practice:

- **Identify areas to change** first identify areas of your life that you usually think negatively about, whether it's work, your daily commute, life changes or a relationship. You can start small by focusing on one area to approach in a more positive way. Think of a positive thought to manage your stress instead of a negative one.
- **Check yourself**. - Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.
- **Be open to humor** - Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times. Seek humor in everyday happenings. When you can laugh at life, you feel less stressed.
- **Follow a healthy lifestyle** - Exercising regularly, following a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and learning how to manage your stress are all part of a healthy lifestyle.
- **Surround yourself with positive people** - Make sure those in your life are positive, supportive people you can depend on to give helpful advice and feedback.
- **Practice positive self-talk** - Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. Put positive thinking into practice.
- **Practice positive thinking everyday** - If you tend to have a negative outlook, don't expect to become an optimist overnight. However, with practice, eventually your self-talk will contain less self-criticism and more self-acceptance and you may become less critical of the world around you. When your state of mind is generally optimistic, you're better able to handle everyday stress in a more constructive way. That ability may contribute to the widely observed health benefits of positive thinking.