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# WELLNESS WEEKLY

## Positive thinking:

Reduce stress by eliminating negative self-talk



Is your glass half-empty or half-full? How you answer this age-old question about positive thinking may reflect your outlook on life, your attitude toward yourself, and whether you're optimistic or pessimistic — and it may even affect your health.

Indeed, some studies show that personality traits like optimism and pessimism can affect many areas of your health and well-being. The positive thinking that typically comes with optimism is a key part of effective stress management. And effective stress management is associated with many health benefits. If you tend to be pessimistic, don't despair — you can learn positive thinking skills. Here's how.

### Understanding positive thinking and self-talk

Positive thinking doesn't mean that you keep your head in the sand and ignore life's less pleasant situations. Positive thinking just means that you approach the unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way. You think the best is going to happen, not the worst.

Positive thinking often starts with self-talk. Self-talk is the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head every day. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. Some of your self-talk comes from logic and reason. Other self-talk may arise from misconceptions that you create because of lack of information. If the thoughts that run through your head are mostly negative, your outlook on life is more likely pessimistic. If your thoughts are mostly positive, you're likely an optimist — someone who practices positive thinking.

### The health benefits of positive thinking

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Better psychological & physical well-being
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

### Identifying negative thinking:

Common forms of negative self-talk include:

- **Filtering.** You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones.
- **Personalizing.** When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself.
- **Catastrophizing.** You automatically anticipate the worst.
- **Polarizing.** You see things only as either good or bad, black or white.

### Focusing on positive thinking

You can learn to turn negative thinking into positive thinking. Below are some ways to think and behave in a more positive and optimistic way:

- **Identify areas to change.** If you want to become more optimistic and engage in more positive thinking, first identify areas of your life that you typically think negatively about, whether it's work, your daily commute or a relationship, for example. You can start small by focusing on one area to approach in a more positive way.
- **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.** Exercise at least three times a week to positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet to fuel your mind and body. And learn to manage stress.
- **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. Negative people may increase your stress level and make you doubt your ability to manage stress in healthy ways.
- **Practice positive self-talk.** Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about you.