

Seasons of Faith and Hope

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MANAGE STRESS WITH POSITIVE THINKING

Are you looking for a way to reduce stress and improve your health? Staff at Mayo Clinic suggest that there is a relationship between positive thinking and health. Positive thinking doesn't mean that you ignore life's unpleasant situations; it just means that you approach unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way. When your state of mind is generally optimistic, you are better able to handle everyday stress in a more constructive way. That ability may contribute to the health benefits of positive thinking.

Positive and negative thinking often start with self-talk. Self-talk is the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head. Some of your self-talk arises from logic and reason, or it may arise from misconceptions that you create because of lack of information, or from expectations due to preconceived ideas of what may happen. If your thoughts are mostly negative, your outlook on life is more likely pessimistic. If your thoughts are mostly positive, you are likely an optimist.

Researchers have identified some of the health benefits of positive thinking:

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

It's not clear 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, thus reducing the harmful health effects of stress on your body.

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 occurs, you automatically blame yourself.

- **Catastrophizing.** You automatically anticipate the worst without facts that the worst will happen.
- **Blaming.** You say someone else is responsible for what happened to you instead of admitting your role in the situation.
- **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.** You set impossible standards and trying to be more perfect sets you up for failure.
- **Polarizing.** You see things as either good or bad with no middle ground.

You can learn to turn negative thinking into positive thinking, resulting in behaving in a more positive and optimistic way. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Identify areas in your life that need to change.** Start small by focusing on one area at a time to approach in a more positive way. Think of a positive thought instead of a negative one to manage your stress.
2. **Check yourself.** Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you are thinking. If your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.
3. **Be open to humor.** Seek humor in everyday events. Laughing at life helps you feel less stressed. Smile or laugh, especially during difficult times.
4. **Engage in a healthy lifestyle.** Plan to exercise for about 30 minutes on most days, broken up in 10-minute chunks of time if that is easier for you. Exercise can positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet, get enough sleep, and learn stress management techniques.
5. **Surround yourself with positive people.** Choose to interact with positive, supportive people whom you can depend on to give helpful advice and feedback. Negative people may increase your stress level.
6. **Practice positive self-talk.**
 - Don't say anything to yourself that you would not 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.
 - Think about things for which you are grateful in your life.