



The Power of Positive Thinking

More and more, the power of optimism is becoming clear. Experts continue to find evidence that our expectations—positive and negative—don't just have psychological effects. They have physical effects as well. Some of the advantages linked to positive thinking include:

- ◆ Less stress
- ◆ Better overall physical health
- ◆ Better overall emotional health
- ◆ Longer lifespan
- ◆ Better coping skills

Self-Esteem

The most fundamental manifestation of positive thinking in our daily lives is the concept of self-esteem or self-confidence.

A positive self-image is integral to leading a healthy life. Studies have shown that people who have confidence in themselves are better able to problem solve and make decisions, take risks and assert themselves, and work towards personal goals. They have healthier and stronger relationships with others. This allows them to lead and enjoy healthier, more productive and more fulfilling lives.

Most people have a bad day, or feel blue, from time to time. However, people who suffer from low self-esteem feel bad about themselves most, or all, of the time. These feelings prevent them from enjoying and making the most of their lives and having healthy relationships with others. In addition, people with a poor self-image may be less likely to take good care of or treat themselves well. And low self-esteem often leads to stress and anxiety—which can dramatically affect your physical and mental health.

Tips for Raising Self-Esteem:

- ◆ **Make your meals healthy and special.** Eat healthy foods and avoid junk foods (foods containing a lot of sugar, salt, or fat). Turn off the television, radio, and stereo when you eat. Set the table, even if you are eating alone. Arrange your food in an attractive way on your plate. If you eat with others, encourage discussion of pleasant topics.
- ◆ **Exercise.** Moving your body helps you to feel better and improves your self-esteem. Arrange a time every day or as often as possible when you can get some exercise, preferably outdoors. *Note*—If you have a health problem that may restrict your ability to exercise, check with your doctor before beginning or changing your exercise habits.
- ◆ **Take time to do things you enjoy.** Make a list of things you enjoy doing. Then do something from that list every day. Add to the list anything new that you discover you enjoy doing.
- ◆ **Engage in activities that make use of your own special talents and abilities.** If you are good with your hands, then make things for yourself, family, and friends. If you like animals, consider having a pet or spending time with friends' pets.
- ◆ **Do things that make you feel good about your appearance.** Dress in a way that makes you feel good about how you look. If you have little money to spend on new clothes, check out thrift stores in your area. Do personal hygiene tasks that make you feel better—things like styling your hair, getting a haircut or getting a manicure.

- ◆ **Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself**—people who treat you well. Try to avoid people who treat you badly.
- ◆ **Make your living space a place that honors the person you are.** Whether you live in a single room, a small apartment, or a large home, make that space comfortable and attractive for you. If you share your living space with others, have some space that is just for you—a place where you can keep your things and know that they will not be disturbed and that you can decorate any way you choose.
- ◆ **Display items that you find attractive or that remind you of your achievements or of special times or people in your life.** If cost is a factor, use your creativity to think of inexpensive or free ways that you can add to the comfort and enjoyment of your space.
- ◆ **Take advantage of opportunities to learn something new or improve your skills.** Take a class or go to a seminar. Many adult education programs are free or very inexpensive. For those that are more costly, ask about a possible scholarship or fee reduction.
- ◆ **Begin doing those things that you know will make you feel better about yourself**—like going on a diet, beginning an exercise program or keeping your living space clean.
- ◆ **Make it a point to treat yourself well every day.** Before you go to bed each night, write about how you treated yourself well during the day.

You will find that you will continue to learn new and better ways to take care of yourself. As you incorporate these changes into your life, your self-esteem will continue to improve.

Positive Thinking Techniques

There are things you can do to help you think more positively.

Self-Talk

One technique that will help you think more positively is to become aware of your negative “self talk” and replace negative thoughts with positive ones. You may be giving yourself negative messages about yourself. Many people do. Most people believe these messages, no matter how untrue or unreal they are. The messages tend to imagine the worst in everything, especially you, and they are hard to turn off or unlearn. You may think these thoughts or give yourself these negative messages so often that you are hardly aware of them. The following exercise can help you become aware of your internal “self talk” and make it more positive.

- ◆ Pay attention to your thoughts. Some people say they notice more negative thinking when they are tired, sick, or dealing with a lot of stress. As you become aware of your negative thoughts, you may notice more and more of them.
- ◆ Write down negative thoughts. Carry a small pad with you as you go about your daily routine for several days and jot down negative thoughts about yourself whenever you notice them.
- ◆ Develop positive statements to replace negative ones
 - Use positive words such as *happy, peaceful, loving, enthusiastic, and warm.*
 - Avoid negative words such as *worried, frightened, upset, tired, bored, not, never, can't.*
 - Always use the present tense, e.g., “I am healthy, I am well, I am happy, I have a good job,” as if the condition already exists.
 - Personalize the statements, direct them towards yourself, e.g., use *I, me,* or your own name

- ◆ Replace the negative thought with the positive whenever you catch yourself thinking negative thoughts
- ◆ Reinforce the positive thought
 - o Repeat the positive thought over and over to yourself, out loud whenever you get a chance or write the positive thought over and over
 - o Share the positive thought with another person who can affirm that the positive is true and who can also help you reinforce the thought
 - o Make signs that say the positive thought and place them in places where you will see them often

Changing the negative thoughts you have about yourself to positive ones takes time and persistence. If you use this technique consistently for four to six weeks, you will notice that you don't think these negative thoughts about yourself as much. If they recur at some other time, you can repeat these activities. Don't give up. You deserve to think good thoughts about yourself!

Affirming Lists

Making lists, rereading them often, and rewriting them from time to time will help you to feel more positively about yourself. If you have a journal, you can write your lists there. If you don't, any piece of paper will do. Make a list of:

- ◆ At least five of your strengths, for example, persistence, courage, friendliness, creativity
- ◆ At least five things you admire about yourself, for example the way you have raised your children, your good relationship with your brother, or your spirituality

- ◆ The five greatest achievements in your life so far, like recovering from a serious illness, graduating from high school, or learning to use a computer
- ◆ At least 20 accomplishments—they can be as simple as learning to tie your shoes, to getting an advanced college degree
- ◆ 10 ways you can “treat” or reward yourself that don't include food and that don't cost anything, such as walking in woods, window-shopping, watching children playing on a playground, gazing at a baby's face or at a beautiful flower, or chatting with a friend
- ◆ 10 things you can do to make yourself laugh
- ◆ 10 things you could do to help someone else
- ◆ 10 things that you do that make you feel good about yourself

Additional Positive Thinking Techniques

Appreciation Exercise

- ◆ Title a piece of paper “I like (your name) because:”
- ◆ Have loved ones write appreciative statements about you
- ◆ Accept these statements as true
- ◆ Re-read often

Self-Esteem Calendar

- ◆ Make a list of small things you can do each day that will make you happy
- ◆ Mark down one of those things for each day in the calendar
- ◆ Commit to doing that one thing each day

Positive Affirmations

Affirmations are positive statements that you can make about yourself that make you feel better about yourself. They describe ways you would like to feel about yourself all the time. They may not, however, describe how you feel about yourself right now.

Make a list of your own affirmations. Keep this list in a handy place, like your pocket or purse. You may want to make copies of your list so you can have them in several different places of easy access. Whenever you can, Read aloud the affirmations over and over. Share them with others when you feel like it. Write them down from time to time. As you do this, the affirmations tend to gradually become true for you. You gradually come to feel better and better about yourself. Each person's affirmations will be individual and unique. However, the following examples of affirmations may help you in making your own list of affirmations:

- ◆ I feel good about myself
- ◆ I take good care of myself. I eat right, get plenty of exercise, do things I enjoy, get good health care, and attend to my personal hygiene needs
- ◆ I spend my time with people who are nice to me and make me feel good about myself
- ◆ I am a good person
- ◆ Many people like me

Don't expect change overnight. But the more you engage in positive thinking, the more you'll realize how much happiness is under your control.

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