

Keeping A Positive Attitude

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Studies show that your mental health can influence your physical health. And certain personality traits — such as optimism or pessimism — can influence how well you live and even how long you live.

Being an optimist may help reduce your risk of dying from heart disease and other causes. A Dutch study found that people who described themselves as being highly optimistic had lower rates of cardiovascular death and less risk of any cause of death than people who said they were highly pessimistic.

Having negative thoughts can make you more illness-prone, say scientists. A study in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* links negative brain activity with a weakened immune system.

Researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison studied people with high levels of brain activity in a region linked to negative thoughts. Those with the highest activity levels responded worse to a flu vaccine.

Scientists already knew that pessimists - people rated as more sensitive to negative events - show more activity in a part of the brain called the right pre-frontal cortex. More activity in the left pre-frontal cortex is linked to positive emotional responses

A Healthy Outlook

The August 2002 issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* reports that people who expect misfortune and who only see the darker side of life don't live as long as those with a more optimistic view. Besides a lowered risk of early death, researchers found other health benefits related to positive attitude. They include:

- Fewer problems with work or other daily activities because of physical or emotional health
- Less pain and fewer limitations due to pain
- Less interference from physical or emotional problems when engaging in social activities
- Increased energy
- Feeling more peaceful, happier and calmer

Positive Attitudes and Aging

Positive attitudes about aging may affect your quality of life as you get older. If you expect to live a long life filled with physical vitality, humor and social connections, those fundamental beliefs can shape your future for the better.

But if you're convinced that old age will be a time of emptiness, depression and sickness, you'll probably find yourself experiencing a mental and physical deterioration. In general, your negative expectations can make you age faster than nature intended. This is a classic example of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Other research suggests that you can increase your chances of living to a ripe old age just by being satisfied with your life.

Be Positive!

Life inevitably presents challenges and frustrations. It's up to you to look for ways to improve your life and enhance your overall being. You can do a number of things to experience greater joy and pleasure in life:

Exercise. Aerobic exercise releases endorphins — the feel good substances — which reduce stress, depression and anxiety. Exercise can also produce a sense of mastery and accomplishment while reducing irritability and anger. Try it! Next time you get upset take at least a half hour walk. Look at the autumn leaves or smell the flowers. Appreciate nature. Count your blessings.

Eat well. Both your body and your mind need good nutrition to function. Eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and grains and adding healthy oils (fish and olive) can improve the way you feel. At the very minimum, take a high potency multi-vitamin every day.

Get plenty of rest. Sleep refreshes you. It improves your attitude and gives you energy for physical activity and coping with stress.

Reduce stress. Eliminating stress and conflict in your life can be rewarding. Identify the areas of your life that cause you the most stress, then change and leave the stress behind.

Detoxify Your Mind. Practice forgiveness for both yourself and others. Don't hold on to grudges. Treat them like hot potatoes. Drop them immediately. Keep the past in the past. Stressing about things that can't be changed only add to your stress.

Use distractions- Engage in hobbies or activities on a regular basis that provide a healthy distraction from what's causing you to have stress or negative thoughts.

It can be difficult to always remain positive. Especially with all the negative issues we hear discussed in the news on a daily basis. You may not be able to become an optimist overnight. However, by incorporating positive thinking strategies into your life you can train yourself to live a positive and healthier life.

“ Life is 10% what happens and 90% how you react to it.”

Unknown