



# Positivity: Your mind's best medicine

Embracing a positive attitude requires you to retrain your brain to focus less on the bad and more on the good.

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

Dear Dr. Julie:

My family keeps telling me that I sound negative all the time but I feel like I'm a realist. Is always prepping for the worst case scenario bad for my health? My family says that I always look at the negative aspects of things. Will that harm me in the long run or is that O.K.?

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While preparing for the worst case scenario may not always be a bad thing, if you find yourself chronically feeling negative or down about things, that attitude in itself may negatively impact your health.

I am a firm believer in preparing for worst case scenarios, but even then you can put a positive spin on things by visualizing yourself overcoming obstacles and knowing you'll still be alright in difficult situations.

Why is it important to put a positive spin on things? Consider affirmations such as "think positive," "look on the bright side" and "believe in yourself." For skeptics, positive thinking may feel like sentimental fluff. But science is now confirming the benefits of positive thinking. It has been linked to more productivity at work, better health, improved relationships and even increased creativity.

The anxiety and fear that arise from negativity stem from a deep instinct known as the "fight or flight" response. When we feel fearful or threatened, we concentrate on that fear.

Over time, negative emotions take a detrimental toll on the brain and overall health. They also may hold you back by setting up roadblocks. For example, self-doubt and negative feelings about your body could discourage you from going to the gym or joining a yoga studio. Similarly, anxiety

about a long to-do list can keep you from completing any tasks. Negativity has the potential to overwhelm your thoughts and decisions without you even consciously registering it.

Having a positive outlook has a number of proven health benefits such as easing depression and anxiety, improving relationships with others and promoting better coping skills when times get tough. Acting positively when difficult situations arise makes compromise and understanding other people's perspectives much easier.

By focusing on the positive, your body benefits physically as well as mentally. Stress and anxiety can make you more susceptible to physical illness and clinical depression.


A positive outlook gives you better tools to make decisions, which in turn leads to less stress and anxiety. Belief that the future will be positive leaves plenty of room for emotional and creative growth. By eliminating fear and doubt, your mind has more room to wander and create.

Spending just five minutes a day consciously monitoring your thoughts is a great way to assess if you participate in negative thinking. Try these strategies to put your brain on a path towards positivity:

**Choose a mantra** Find a phrase or word that means something to you and repeat it throughout the day when you feel negativity creeping its way into your mind. It can be something as simple as reminding yourself to breathe and smile.

**Make a list of things you are thankful for** Nothing is too big or small for this list, and once you get started there's a good chance you'll be reminded there's a lot in life to be thankful for. Make a list of five to 10 things and reflect on why they are important to you.

**Meditate** Meditation improves focus and increases mindfulness, positive thoughts and a sense of purpose. Meditation is for everyone, and can be practiced in any calm and quiet space. Even five minutes of concentrated meditation has long-lasting benefits for your outlook on life.

**Have fun!** Positive feelings are at their highest when you're doing something that you love. Incorporate one relaxing or leisurely activity into your everyday routine to allow your mind to take a break from responsibilities and stress. Make time for activities you enjoy and feel the positivity radiate. 

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