

Understanding the Connection Between Positivity and Physical Health

1st February 2021

Healthy and happy, happy and healthy—does one element of personal wellbeing come before the other? Does being healthy have an impact on being happy, and vice-versa?

Positive emotions contribute to our wellbeing, but can also have an impact on our physical health. Multiple studies have shown that there's a direct connection between health and attitude; researchers at [Harvard University](#) have proved that positive emotions can help make life longer and healthier. One study showed that people with a more positive outlook were quicker to recover from traumatic physical illness. Researchers in Utah also noted that a positive mood might have an effect on immune system functions and heart health.

The endorphins released through exercise can make you happy, and feeling healthy makes it easier to be optimistic about the future. So if you're looking for a healthier lifestyle, positive thinking might be a good place to start!

In contrast, negative thinking can have an adverse effect on the body. You might find yourself thinking "nothing matters, I might as well skip a workout" or "I know it's nice outside and a walk would be good, but I can't be bothered right now." The negative impact, or worry, can also have the following impact on the body:

- muscle tension and muscle pain
- headaches
- digestive problems
- chest pain
- reduced libido or sex drive
- sleep problems
- fatigue

Physical changes can also alert you to the fact that your mental health might be at risk. If you've been experiencing any of the above symptoms, it might be worthwhile to consider what you've been spending your time thinking about and ask yourself if there's a way that you could have more positive thoughts.

You might find it useful to:

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Manage your moods. Take practical steps to start your work with a healthy attitude and keep it going throughout the day.

Cultivate optimism. You can foster optimism in yourself. As Martin Seligman wrote in his book *Learned Optimism*: "Anytime you find yourself down or anxious or angry, ask what you are saying to yourself. Sometimes the beliefs will turn out to be accurate; when this is so, concentrate on the ways you can alter the situation and prevent adversity from becoming a disaster. But usually, your negative beliefs are distortions. Challenge them. Don't let them run your emotional life." In short, optimists perceive a bad situation as a challenge and try harder to solve the problem.

Keep a list of helpful thoughts and messages. Whenever you come across a helpful and positive idea or quote that makes sense to you, write it down. These may be positive thoughts, calming thoughts, humour—anything that you notice really helps put you in a better mood. Look at something from your "library" of messages every morning and take it to heart as you begin your day.

Ignore or avoid complainers. If you find yourself commiserating with other complainers, try to spend less time interacting with them. One person's complaining attitude reinforces similar attitudes in others and increases negativity all around. "Chronic complainers get stuck in victim mode, and that irritates the people around them," says psychologist Michael Cunningham.

Make positive choices. You have more control over your moods and attitudes than you think.

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