POSITIVE THINKING:
BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Is your glass half-empty or half-full? How you answer this age-old question about positive thinking may reflect your outlook on life and your attitude toward yourself.

In fact, some studies show that personality traits — optimism and pessimism — can affect how well you live and even how long you live. Positive thinking is a key part of an effective stress management strategy.

Researchers continue to explore the effects of positive thinking and optimism on health. Health benefits that positive thinking may provide include:

- Decreased negative stress
- Greater resistance to catching the common cold
- A sense of well-being and improved health
- Reduced risk of coronary artery disease
- Better coping skills during hardships

It is unclear why people who engage in positive thinking experience these health benefits. But one theory is that having a positive outlook enables you to cope better with stressful situations, which reduce the harmful health effects of stress on your body.

Negative Self-Talk

What if your self-talk is mainly negative? That doesn't mean you're doomed to an unhappy life. Negative self-talk just means that your own misperceptions, lack of information and distorted ideas have overpowered your capacity for logic and reason. Some common forms of negative self-talk include:

- <u>Filtering</u>: You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones. For example, you received a strong grade on a quiz, but instead of focusing on the good grade, you spend the evening criticizing yourself for not getting a perfect score.
- <u>Personalizing</u>: When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself. For example, an evening out with friends gets canceled--you assume that the change in plans is because no one wanted to be around you.
- <u>Catastrophizing</u>: You automatically anticipate the worst. You think one awkward interaction with a professor will mean the end of your academic career.
- <u>Polarizing</u>: You see things only as good or bad, black or white--there is no gray area. Anything short of perfection means total failure.

You Can Learn Positive Thinking

Instead of giving in to these kinds of negative self-talk, weed out misperceptions and irrational thinking and then challenge them with rational, positive thoughts. When you do this, your self-talk will gradually become realistic and self-affirming — you engage in positive thinking.

You can learn to turn negative thinking into positive thinking. The process is simple, but it takes time and practice — you are creating a new habit, after all.

Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.

Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else.

Examples of typical negative self-talk and how you might apply a positive thinking twist include:

Negative Self Talk	Reframing
I'm not smart enough to be here at UC Berkeley.	I deserve to be here. I have a long history of being a strong student.
My advisor hates me.	I'll find a way to work well with my advisor.
I'm never going to get better at this class.	I'll continue to do my best, and if I need to, I'll get some extra help.
No one wants to go out with me.	I'm a good, interesting person. I'm grateful for the friends in my life.

Practice Positive Thinking Every Day

If you tend to have a negative outlook, don't expect to become an optimist overnight. But with practice, eventually, your self-talk will automatically contain less self-criticism and more self-acceptance. You may also become less critical of the world around you.

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