

Positive vs. Negative

By Suze Hargraves

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Here's one I have trouble with; positive thinking. Oh sure, I'm well aware of "the power of positive thinking", but my genetic makeup is the result of a long line of pessimists marrying pessimists. These people were hard edged Irish and Yankees. Sarcasm is my first language. Eight years in New York City only served to hone the edge of my natural penchant for pessimism. Despite these inborn and environmentally driven follies however, I, like so many others I know, am trying to foster a more positive attitude.

Books touting the power of positive thinking have been around a long time. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale penned "The Power of Positive Thinking" in 1952. In 2006 "The Secret" hit the same self-help market and reframed positive thinking into terms of "universal law of attraction". According to Wikipedia, "The Law of Attraction argues that thoughts (both conscious and unconscious) can affect things outside the head, not just through motivation, but by other means. The Law of Attraction says that which is like unto itself is drawn." Both books have supporters and detractors, but the fact remains how humans think does, indeed, influence certain, but not all, situations in their lives.

In medicine, positive thinking pans out in what is called "the placebo effect". WebMD describes it as such, "The effectiveness of any medical treatment depends in part on how useful you expect it to be. The "placebo effect" proves this. A placebo is a drug or treatment that provides no medical benefit except for the patient's belief that it will help." They offer these tips for developing your sunny side when it comes to your health:

1. Stop all negative self-talk. Make positive statements that promote your recovery.
2. Send yourself a steady stream of affirmations. An affirmation is a phrase or sentence that sends strong, positive statements to you about you, such as "I am a capable person" or "My joints are strong and flexible."
3. Visualize health and healing.
4. Don't feel guilty. There is no value in feeling guilty about health problems. While there is a lot you can do to reduce your risk for health problems and improve your chances of recovery, some illnesses may develop and persist no matter what you do. Some things just are. Do the best you can.

Everyday physical activities such as time with a pet, exercise, working in a garden, laughter, smiling, prayer, yoga, meditation and interacting with society in a positive way are also good for nurturing the mind-body connection.

According to Science Daily, a study published by Toshihiko Maruta, M.D., of the Mayo Clinic Department of Psychiatry and Psychology states, "Researchers evaluated results from a personality test taken by participants over 30 years ago and compared them to later mortality rates. The study revealed that those who scored high on optimism had a 50 percent lower risk of premature death than those who scored more pessimistic. Besides a lowered risk of early death, researchers found other health benefits related to positive attitude. The study also revealed that those who scored high on optimism had:

- 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
- More peaceful, happier and calmer feelings

I'll most likely never be a complete optimist, but that's not a bad thing either. While some optimists might disagree, looking at the world through rose colored glasses can be counterproductive and set

people up for deep disappointment. Negative thinking is sometimes healthy self-defense. The trick is to turn negative self-defense into a positive offensive strategy. Happiness lies somewhere in the middle.

When I find it, I'll save a spot for you.