

Positive thinking helps with stress management and can even improve your health. Overcome negative self-talk by recognizing it and practicing with some examples provided.

By Mayo Clinic staff

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

In fact, some studies show that these personality traits — optimism and pessimism — can affect many areas of your health and well-being. Positive thinking also is a key part of effective stress management. Positive thinking doesn't mean that you keep your head in the sand and ignore life's less pleasant situations. It just means that you approach the unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way.

With all this in mind, take a refresher course in positive thinking. Learn how to put positive thinking into action in your own life, and reap the benefits.

Understanding positive thinking and self-talk

Self-talk is the endless stream of thoughts that run through your head every day. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. Some of your self-talk comes from logic and reason. Other self-talk may arise from misconceptions that you create because of lack of information.

If the thoughts that run through your head are mostly negative, your outlook on life is more likely pessimistic. If your thoughts are mostly positive, you're likely an optimist — someone who practices positive thinking.

The health benefits of positive thinking

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

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

It's unclear why people who engage in positive thinking experience these health benefits. One theory is that having a positive outlook enables you to cope better with stressful situations, which reduces the harmful health effects of stress on your body. It's also thought that positive and optimistic people live healthier lifestyles — they get more physical activity, follow a healthier diet, and have reduced rates of smoking and alcohol consumption.