

LIFE LINES

Volume 5, Number 9

Improving your quality of life
One step at a time

FINDING THE SILVER LINING



'Every cloud has a silver lining' is an old saying that means something positive can be found in every situation, even the stormiest. In other words, it's about having an optimistic outlook on life. It's well documented that optimists are happier, more resilient and less stressed than pessimists¹ and several recent studies also indicate that people who look on the bright side are leading longer², healthier lives – and are more successful³.

Your mental outlook can have a profound effect on your long-term health. Earlier this year, researchers from the University of Illinois published research⁴ that found people with a positive outlook on life are twice as likely to have healthier hearts, lower cholesterol, better circulation and blood sugar levels and be physically active. They are also less likely to be overweight or smoke. The research was the first to prove that optimists are less likely to suffer from depression and more likely to take care of themselves.

Other recent studies⁵ have found that optimists have stronger immune systems, cope better with stress and are more able to bounce back from adversity and disappointment.

Finding the silver lining

Being an optimist doesn't mean constantly having your head in the clouds and ignoring tough issues. It's about believing in yourself, having a positive approach to life and trying to make the most of difficult situations.



Finding the Silver Lining

Need some help finding that silver lining? Try some of the following approaches:

- **Be grateful⁶.** Instead of focusing on disappointments or what you don't have, turn your attention to all the things for which you are grateful – your health, your partner, your children, your friends, etc.
- **Change your perspective⁷.** Winston Churchill said, "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." You may not be able to change the world, but you can change how you see the world. Let go of any thoughts that the world is against you or that you were born unlucky and instead take control of your life.
- **Don't dwell on the past⁸.** We all go through painful times but optimists don't let past hurts hold them back. Instead they learn from their experiences and let them go, looking to a future they see as full of possibilities. Optimists feel they control their lives, instead of the other way around.
- **Practise positive self-talk⁹.** There is a good rule of thumb for developing healthy self-esteem: Don't say anything to or about yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be kind and respectful to yourself. Stop using negative, insulting phrases such as "I'm an idiot" or "I'm useless." Every time a negative thought enters your mind, try to replace it with a more constructive one. Do this again and again and you'll train your mind to ignore negative thoughts and instead think more positively.
- **Surround yourself with positivity¹⁰.** Optimism is contagious so try to surround yourself with positive, supportive people you can depend on. Walk away from negative talk, gossip or complaints.

- **Help others¹¹.** Acts of kindness also help us by reducing our sense of social isolation and lifting our spirits. Giving a helping hand to a friend in need or to someone less fortunate takes the focus away from ourselves and boosts our gratitude for the good things in our life.
- **Smile, laugh and giggle¹².** It's hard to think negatively when you're laughing. But laughing and smiling also makes you feel good and reduces stress. That's because neurotransmitters called endorphins – the body's feel-good chemicals – are released when you smile. Even a fake smile works.
- **Look after yourself¹³.** What you eat has a direct effect on your attitude, as does exercise – remember those endorphins? Eat a varied diet rich in fresh foods and low on processed ones and get regular exercise – a brisk evening walk will do.

And finally, find things that bring you joy¹⁴. What made you happy when you were young? Was it sports, dancing, music, a hobby, or playing with your dog? It's easy to find the silver lining when you're doing things that nurture your soul.

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2. University of Illinois, Journal of Health Behavior and Policy Review. January 2015.
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1.866.398.9505 (Numéro sans frais - en français)

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