

Healthy Optimism

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Let me ask you this, have you considered the need for both pessimistic and optimistic thinking? Might I suggest that a true optimist appreciates both hopeful and cynical thinking? It's a sign of resilience to be able to accept life's contradictions.

However, based on positive psychology findings, there are a number of advantages to developing an optimistic perspective. Since it supports depression, pessimism is associated with a weak immune system. Pessimism feels down—blue, sad, worried or anxious. Optimism and pessimism can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Because pessimists tend not to create or face challenges, they fail more frequently—even when success is possible.

"Burnout is nature's way of telling you, you've been going through the motions your soul has departed; you're a zombie, a member of the walking dead, a sleepwalker. False **optimism** is like administering stimulants to an exhausted nervous system."

Sam Keen

Alternatively, optimism encourages happiness and, therefore, is associated with vitality and health. Optimism feels up—hopeful, confident and cheerful. An optimist often enjoys challenges regardless of their outcome. Yet we need healthy pessimism or doubt. Some smokers have been so optimistic they smoked themselves to death. It's the pessimist who insists on having a year's worth of living expenses tucked away should a lay off occur. So we need some healthy cynicism. It may have been an optimist who invented the automobile and a pessimist who created the brakes and the air bag. If you believe you would benefit from increasing your pessimism, read your newspaper headlines. If you believe you would benefit from increasing your optimism take the following quiz and make changes accordingly.

Optimism Quiz

Score your optimism by placing a number 0 to 5 beside the statements below:

0=never to 5=almost always

1. ___ I realize my beliefs are just that—beliefs. They may or may not be factual.
2. ___ I ask myself if my beliefs are useful and supportive to my work and life.
3. ___ I argue with myself. I say "Stop!" to pessimistic self-talk.
4. ___ I replace negative self-talk with optimistic thinking such as "I know enough."
5. ___ I ask myself, "What's the worst that could happen?"
6. ___ I have a strategy to deal with that outcome?" If not, I create one.
7. ___ I make a difference by doing something for those less fortunate.
8. ___ I develop optimism by looking for the bright side.
9. ___ I count my blessings.
10. ___ I choose to spend time with those who have realistic yet upbeat perspectives.

Total: ___ out of a possible 50.

I will improve my lowest 3 scores by:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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