

MENTAL NOTES

A mind expanding newsletter from Mark Zust, *The Perceptionist*



Think On The Bright Side

December, 2009

“Always look on the bright side of life and you’ll be happier and live longer,” my 85 year old neighbor Roy Hinch used to tell me. It turns out he was right. The journal *Circulation* recently showed that good health and a sunny outlook could very well be connected. Over a period of eight years researchers studied nearly 100,000 women to track how many suffered heart attacks and how long they lived. “Optimists had a 16% lower risk of having heart attacks” reported Dr. Hilary Tindle of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. A 2004 study in Holland of 1,000 elderly people also reported a connection between optimism and a lower risk of death from heart disease. More importantly, the reverse seems to be true.

The Mayo Clinic’s study of more than 800 patients over a 30 year period concluded that pessimists ran a 19% higher risk of early death than optimists. So what is it about a positive outlook that seems to allow some people to live longer, healthier lives? For one, optimists seem to be prone to “positive future expectations,” explains Dr. Tindle. “They expect good things to happen and work toward them.” Upon being diagnosed with diabetes, for instance, an optimist will usually accept and take charge of the situation, such as exercising, taking medications and watching their diet. In turn these behaviors would likely lower his or her chances of heart disease and high blood pressure. On the other hand, pessimists often feel helpless when things go wrong and often believe that bad luck repeats itself. This attitude can increase stress and contribute to depression. But even if you tend to look at the glass half empty, your disposition can change if you learn new ways to think. The key is to recognize your thought patterns, challenge them, and in time, to replace negative patterns with more positive alternatives. Dr. Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania, calls this “resiliency training.” By working with a trained therapist, Dr. Seligman says he has observed many patients who “massively change pessimism into optimism and do so lastingly.” At the very least, being more aware of how we think about our lives and being a little more grateful for our blessings is its own reward.

Watch Your Language!

The self talk that fills your head has a lot to do with your attitude. Try the following for the next three days: Keep a journal of the words you use when faced with a challenge or something new. How often do the words “I don’t think I...” or “Why do I have to...” creep in? Try replacing these and other limiting statements with “Why not?” and “I’ll give it a try.” Give your mind and heart a chance to grow and see what happens.



Quotable:

“For myself I am an optimist. It does not seem to be much use being anything else.”

Winston Churchill

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Resources

- brainrules.net
- nytimes.com/2009/04/06/health/research/06brain.html

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