**Positive thinking: Reduce stress by eliminating negative self-talk**

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/library/positive-thinking/SR00009.html>

**Understanding positive thinking and self-talk**

Positive thinking often starts with self-talk. Self-talk is the endless stream of unspoken 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

**Identifying negative thinking**

Not sure if your self-talk is positive or negative? Here are some common forms of negative self-talk:

* **Filtering.** You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones. For example, say you had a great day at work. You completed your tasks ahead of time and were complimented for doing a speedy and thorough job. But you forgot one minor step. That evening, you focus only on your oversight and forget about the compliments you received.
* **Personalizing.** When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself. For example, you hear that an evening out with friends is canceled, and you assume that the change in plans is because no one wanted to be around you.
* **Catastrophizing.** You automatically anticipate the worst. The drive-through coffee shop gets your order wrong and you automatically think that the rest of your day will be a disaster.
* **Polarizing.** You see things only as either good or bad, black or white. There is no middle ground. You feel that you have to be perfect or that you're a total failure.

**Focusing on positive thinking**

You can learn to turn negative thinking into positive thinking. The process is simple, but it does take time and practice — you're creating a new habit, after all. Here are some ways to think and behave in a more positive and optimistic way:

* **Identify areas to change.** If you want to become more optimistic and engage in more positive thinking, first identify areas of your life that you typically think negatively about, whether it's work, your daily commute or a relationship, for example. You can start small by focusing on one area to approach in a more positive way.
* **Check yourself.** Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.
* **Be open to humor.** Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times. Seek humor in everyday happenings. When you can laugh at life, you feel less stressed.
* **Follow a healthy lifestyle.** Exercise at least three times a week to positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet to fuel your mind and body. And learn to manage stress.
* **Surround yourself with positive people.** Make sure those in your life are positive, supportive people you can depend on to give helpful advice and feedback. Negative people may increase your stress level and make you doubt your ability to manage stress in healthy ways.
* **Practice positive self-talk.** Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about you.