

Optimism and Your Health



Optimism has received attention in recent years, with research attesting to its significant health benefits. One study showed that optimistic people are more likely to live past 85 years old, or 15% longer than non-optimistic people. That makes pessimism as a life orientation nearly as harmful as poorly managed type 2 diabetes! Fortunately, optimism can be understood, learned, practiced, and acquired as a naturally

reactive way of viewing the world. You may have an awareness of how optimistic you are (or are not) from feedback you have periodically received from others. Viewing the need to be more optimistic as a health issue can inspire you to take the next steps to improve your disposition. The key is practicing a few exercises that will shift and slowly reinforce behavior change with their results. For example, experiment with a “coincidence journal.” Unlike a diary or the daily recording of positive affirmations, a coincidence journal is a highly proactive approach to maintaining awareness and spotting positive events and pleasing interactions as they occur. In a way a diary can’t (although diaries can be helpful, too), this trains your brain to think ahead, spot, and eventually expect daily life experiences that are affirming. You can find more ideas for retraining your thought patterns to reflect more optimism through hundreds of books and resources online. There is more to discover about the impact of optimism, but scientists think being optimistic may be accompanied by more goal-setting behaviors, staying on top of one’s health needs, and proactive communication skills that reduce stress and conflict. They’re not sure, but with experimentation, you may discover optimism’s fortunes in your own life.

Source: <https://www.harvard.edu/> [search: “optimism live longer”]

Strengthen Your Immune System

Vaccinations may boost resistance, but cures for virus-based illnesses like the flu don’t exist. So, keep your immune system “tuned”—it’s the only one you’ve got! Boost your immune system with 1) adequate sleep; 2) getting recommended vaccinations; 3) eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants; 4) getting recommended exercise; 5) washing your hands and maintaining good hygiene; 6) avoiding smoking and heavy alcohol use (or getting evaluated for addictive illness if you struggle with these issues); and 7) maintaining a healthy weight. The immune system becomes less efficient with age. Examine gaps in your immune system maintenance plan, and talk to your EAP, medical doctor, or health/wellness adviser to overcome roadblocks. It may be a first step to a longer life.

Using an EAP When the Problem Isn’t Yours

Reach out to your employee assistance program for help with personal problems that aren’t directly your problem but still affect you. Examples include mental illness that affects a relative, a close friend experiencing homelessness, a loved one or a friend you fear is at risk for self-harm following a tragic incident, etc. The employee assistance program can be a resource even if the problem isn’t directly your own.

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Should You Freeze Your Credit Report?

Visit the federal government website [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov) for free advice on fixing problems caused by identity theft. You can print off an entire recovery plan, and it will walk you through each step, including tracking progress. You also can find prepared forms for communication with credit bureaus and debt collectors—free services that otherwise would cost a lot of money. Do you know what a “credit freeze” is? It prevents others from accessing your credit report so it can’t be used to obtain credit. It’s free, it doesn’t affect your credit rating, and you’re in control of lifting it. Learn more at [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov).

Couples Counseling: Finding Motivation to Go

More couples have discussed couples counseling than will ever go. Many checklists online will help you decide whether your relationship could use help, but only a strong enough reason will empower you to make the call. If you’re hesitating, you may have misconceptions about couples counseling. One common fear is the therapist will align with your partner and together confront all your imperfections. That won’t happen with an experienced professional. Instead, you will be put at ease, and what you envision as the stereotype will be quickly dismissed. Each of you will discover what you’re doing healthfully, along with what you can consider doing differently in your relationship to make it what you want. The good news is the likelihood of feeling more empowered while you work toward changes you and your partner agree on. With commitment, most couples enjoy a reduction in tension they have grown weary of experiencing each day, along with hope that the changes sought will last.