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## Roses or thorns?

Positive thinking has many benefits

**Note:** *This article is taken from "It's Time to Think Positive", which was published by American Behavioral, Auburn University's Employee Assistance Provider.*

Picture a rose bush in full bloom. What did you notice first: the roses or the thorns? A rose bush has plenty of both. But if you focused on the roses and overlooked the thorns, you were thinking positive.

There is a lesson here. Thinking positive is a choice. It's a decision to appreciate the roses in your life (loved ones, favorite activities, and relaxing moments) while letting go of the thorns (stresses, disappointments, and losses).

This doesn't mean pretending to be happy when you're not. If you're upset, it's important to deal with and talk about your feelings. Thinking positive means choosing to fill your mind with positive thoughts. Your reward will be a calmer, more hopeful attitude.

"A positive outlook is necessary to prevent depression, to get along with others, and to feel better about yourself and your life," says psychologist Norman Abeles, Ph.D., past president of the American Psychological Association.

If you have health problems, it's important not to get stuck down in the dumps. "A negative attitude makes you feel worse physically. It increases your stress, which worsens your pain and drains your energy," says Abeles. On the other hand, "a positive attitude helps you relax and feel more competent" when dealing with everyday challenges.

Dolores Gallagher Thompson, Ph.D., director of the Older Adults and Family Center at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto, Calif., says older adults dealing with health problems become sad that they can't do everything they used to. At that point, some decide they can't ever be happy again.

"I call thinking that starts spiraling downward 'pre-depression,'" she says. "When you start to feel this way, it's time to change your thinking. If you don't, eventually you will become depressed."

### How to Change Your Mind

Regardless of your age, if you tend to count your worries instead of your blessings, it's time for a fresh approach. Here's how to start thinking more positively.

- **Reason with facts, not feelings.** Changes in your life can make you feel uncertain and anxious. You may then fear the worst. "Step back and get the facts," says Gallagher Thompson. "Talk to an expert, such as your doctor, and find out exactly what you can expect. Then ask yourself, 'If this was happening to somebody else, what advice would I give them?'"
- **Stay connected.** Keep in touch with friends and loved ones and be open to developing new friendships. Volunteering your time and keeping active in clubs or faith-based groups will help you focus on others more than yourself. "Spend time with positive people who are living active, fulfilled lives," says Abeles.
- **Plan for your happiness.** Schedule time for pleasant activities as often as possible. Having something to look forward to will keep your spirits up.
- **Become a problem-solver.** Don't just wish problems would go away. Take steps to solve them as quickly as possible, asking for support and help from others.
- **Find the silver lining.** Give yourself time to adjust to change or loss. Change can bring new opportunities: Be open to them. "Your life won't be the same, but it likely can be better than what you imagine," says Gallagher Thompson.



## THEY SAID IT...



Do you need a little extra motivation? Then check out these quotes on positive thinking.

"Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see a shadow." – Helen Keller

"Success is falling nine times and getting up ten." – Jon Bon Jovi

"The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude." – Oprah Winfrey

"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door." – Milton Berle

"We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated." – Maya Angelou

"Set your goals high, and don't stop till you get there." – Bo Jackson