

The Price Of Pessimism

Your state of mind affects your health – and when you think like a pessimist, always expecting the worst, your fight-or-flight response may remain stuck on standby. Think of it as revving an engine – it’s useful before a race, but if you keep gunning it, you’ll burn out your motor. And that can cause long-term damage. For example, pessimists tend to have higher blood pressure and triglyceride levels than optimists have and their odds of heart attack and early death are higher too, according to University of Pittsburgh research.

Have a look at how a dour outlook can affect your organs, but it doesn’t say the ways optimism can boost your health. “Happy and hopeful people are more likely to exercise, eat healthily and stop smoking,” says cardiac psychiatrist Dr Jeffrey Huffman. In other words, happiness empowers you to take charge of your health. And by staying positive, you can also tighten the tap on cortisol, a hormone linked to artery calcification and IL-6, an inflammatory cytokine linked to multiple sclerosis and heart disease. So maybe it’s time you started looking on the bright side. It might just save your life

Below is how to amp up your optimism and get those positive vibes going.

YOUR SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK:

Optimism is like a muscle: if you exercise it on a regular basis, you can build it up, says cardiac psychiatrist Dr Jeffrey Huffman. So once a week or so, try powering up your outlook by checking off the activities in this optimism-building workout.

Reflect on the past

Think of accomplishments and events that made you proud. “Doing this reminds you that your abilities have led to good life experiences,” Huffman says.

Relish the present

Before you go to bed, think about three good things that happened that day, says Huffman. It’ll help you tap your gratitude, even if you feel stressed.

Imagine your future

Picture your perfect life (in lots of detail) five years from now. Then focus on what’s attainable. Jen may be taken, but her cute friend? Why the heck not?



Amygdala

When your brain's emotion CPU detects a negative event, it sends out a stress signal that then flips on your fight- or-flight response system.

Spinal cord

Stress signals shoot down the spinal cord and through your nervous system, putting your organs in a state of high alert.

Lungs

The smooth muscles that line your airways relax. Your airways dilate and breathing speeds up to meet your body's higher demand for oxygen.

Heart

Stress causes your pulse and blood pressure to spike and inflammatory molecules called cytokines travel through your bloodstream.

Liver

To prep for exertion, your liver begins breaking glycogen down into glucose – unnecessary work if there's no real danger or threat.

Adrenal glands

If your pessimistic stress mode continues, adrenaline, cortisol and other stress hormones kick in to keep your heart rate elevated.

Kidneys and Gut

The blood vessels that lead to inner organs constrict, slowing urine production as well as digestion – which is good only if you need to run or fight.

By Mens Health Staff - Posted on 10th October 2014

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