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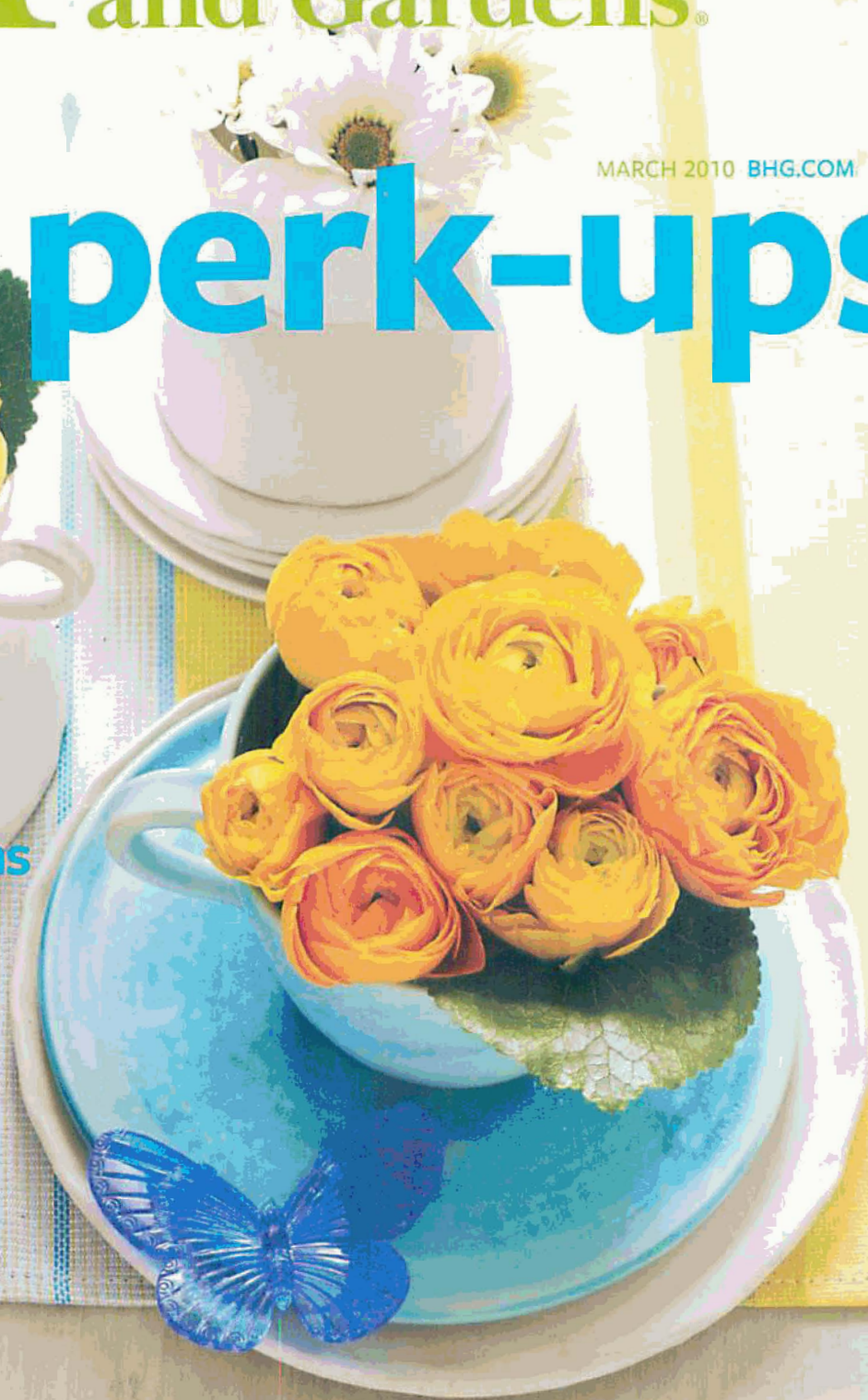
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## easy perk-ups

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**The Secrets of  
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**Eating Healthier?  
9 Ways Your  
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**Hearty & Fast  
Weeknight Meals**  
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# The Pessimist's Guide to a Happier Life

You can become a glass-half-full person simply by changing your thought process and challenging your negative beliefs.

by JULIE A. EVANS

Only the most confirmed pessimist would expect to fail an optimism quiz, so when Susan received her surprisingly low score it was like getting a half-empty glass of water right in the face.

Instead of accepting her lot, however, she rather hopefully decided to see if she could turn lemons into lemonade and become an optimist. A grad student in psychology, she constructed a self-intervention that would give her outlook a positive charge and—more lemonade—become the basis for a research project at the same time.

Even if you tend to focus on the negative, you can learn to redirect pessimistic thoughts and frame them in a more optimistic light.

**CAROLINE ADAMS MILLER, AUTHOR OF *CREATING YOUR BEST LIFE***

For help she turned to Caroline Adams Miller, Washington, D.C.-based professional coach and author of *Creating Your Best Life*, who showed how to nurture her optimism.

"Even if your natural tendency is to focus on the negative, you can learn to

redirect pessimistic thoughts and frame them in a more optimistic light," says Miller. "Optimists expect good things to happen in their lives and work toward creating positive change to make those good things come true. Pessimistic people come up with reasons why they shouldn't even try."

It takes work, but both Miller and say it's worth the effort. Miller points to research showing that optimists tend to be happier, living longer and healthier lives with stronger relationships. And as for , she now boasts a graduate degree and a suitably high score on the optimism test.

## WHAT'S ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

To become a more optimistic thinker, look inward and listen to what's playing on your "internal radio station," says Karen Reivich, Ph.D., research associate at the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center and co-author of *The Resilience Factor*.

Your personal playlist sends you messages when you're running late for a meeting, deciding whether to go for a run, or struggling to get dinner on the table for your hungry family after work. Building awareness of what's playing in your head is a critical first step to learning how to become more optimistic,



says Reivich. Figure out if you're sending yourself negative warnings or soothing tips that help you put things in perspective.

"One of the most important ways to promote optimism is to learn how to challenge your own negative beliefs or your tendency to catastrophize situations and give up too soon," says Reivich.

That's exactly what Jid. She began writing several daily

says Reivich. "It quiets the self and enhances a sense of confidence and competence and optimism. That's something anyone can practice."

## STRATEGIES FOR BOOSTING OPTIMISM

**Make life lists.** Write down five goals that you've achieved and that you enjoy thinking about, says Miller. Research shows that the happiest people have clear-cut life goals, take risks, and persevere. Then, on a fresh

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"optimisms," or hopeful thoughts, along with personal evidence of positive outcomes.

For example, Jid wrote: "Next to my desk is a photo of me with my mother and siblings on the banister of my grandparents' house. I'm laughing so hard that my eyes are shut. I know this joy always exists within and I am hopeful that it will bubble up to the surface more frequently. Why not every day?"

Writing at least two optimisms daily for six weeks "made a pretty dramatic difference in my life," says Jid.

"Before doing this intervention, I couldn't move forward, because I got stuck on what could go wrong. By writing down my optimisms, I realized good things are just as likely to happen as bad things."

## PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

"The ability to find and use evidence to contradict pessimistic thoughts is what we call real-time resilience,"

sheet of paper, write down five goals that you'd like to accomplish. Goals should be specific, measurable, meaningful, and challenging. Silence your inner critic. Aim for a three-to-one ratio of positive to negative comments and thoughts. If you catch yourself with a negative thought, fight back by repeating a positive affirmation.

**Take a time-out.** Every day, set aside time—even if it's just five minutes—to appreciate the beauty around you, from your child's gleeful giggles to a full moon to the first signs of spring. **Treasure the moment.** With your family, decorate a treasure box and fill it with blank index cards.

Throughout the week, write down any special moments that happen and ask everyone to do the same. At dinner (or when the family gathers), take turns pulling a treasure from the box and reading it aloud. This exercise boosts optimistic thinking and encourages conversation. ☺

## REALITY CHECK

**ARE YOU AN OPTIMIST OR A PESSIMIST?** Find out which way you lean by taking this short quiz.

### 1. You find a \$20 bill on the street and you think:

- A. "Wow! This is my lucky day."
- B. "It pays to be observant."

### 2. The new diet you've been trying is working. You've lost 5 pounds this month. Your reaction:

- A. "I've finally found a diet that works. I hope I can drop another 5 pounds."
- B. "My effort is paying off. I'll have no trouble reaching my goal."

### 3. You're having lunch when the waitress splashes a bit of red wine on your white shirt. You hope:

- A. "That no one will notice the stain when I get back to the office."
- B. "The waitress isn't distressed by the accidental spill."

**1. YOU'RE A PESSIMIST IF YOU ANSWERED "A."** Pessimists often feel luck plays a key role in success. Optimists are those who pick "B," because they believe their own actions—being observant—lead to positive outcomes.

**2. THE OPTIMISTIC ANSWER IS "B."** Optimists believe they are in charge of their own success. Pessimists tend to rely on external factors (a diet), rather than on themselves, for achieving goals.

**3. OF COURSE, THE "B" ANSWER IS MORE OPTIMISTIC.** Although answer "A" seems pretty hopeful, it focuses on a negative scenario. Optimists would shrug off such a mistake and not worry about it.