easy perk-ups

The Secrets of Feel-Good Kitchens

Eating Healthier? 9 Ways Your Kitchen Can Help

Hearty & Fast Weeknight Meals
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.

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,
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. **KAREN REIVICH, PH.D.**

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

For example, 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. "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," 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...