

11 Ways to Instantly Become a More Positive Person



Here’s a suggestion that’s much easier said than done: Who wouldn’t want to affirm that everything will be okay — and feel happier as a result? Optimism is something to strive for, but the good news is you don’t have to be an unrealistic Pollyanna to reframe your point of view and become a more positive person.

In fact, it’s important to embrace the darker aspects of a situation in the process. “The most helpful definition of being positive is having hope and confidence in one’s ability to handle what’s tough, along with remembering that nothing is all negative all the time,” explains Jo Eckler, PsyD, a therapist in Austin, Texas and author of the book *I Can’t Fix You—Because You’re Not Broken*. Instead, she defines positivity as the ability to identify sunnier takeaways or moments of relief, no matter how small.

If you’re not naturally prone to positivity or find yourself dealing with increasing anxiety—don’t beat yourself up. “Some people are born with rose-colored glasses and a neural architecture that predisposes them to enjoy positive emotions and the best in the world,” says Jamie Gruman, PhD., professor at the University of Guelph and author of the book *Boost: The Science of Recharging Yourself in an Age of Unrelenting Demands*. “Other people come into the world with grey-colored glasses instead of the rose-colored variety—it’s a genetic lottery,” he explains.

While learning how to be a happier person is more challenging for some than others, anyone can pick up the skills required to get there. Whether you’re looking to simply leave everyday melancholy behind, stay motivated at work, improve on your relationship, or become more confident, these 11 tips will train your brain to look on the bright side—and possibly change your life in the process.

1. Pick a personal mantra—and repeat it.

It might feel strange at first, but talking to yourself is an easy trick that can help. “We’re often harder on ourselves than we would ever be to someone else, so talk to yourself like you would to your best friend,” says Erin Parisi, a licensed mental health counselor in Orlando, Florida.

To get comfortable doing this, try creating a positive personal mantra or affirmation. Examples include, “It is what it is,” “Everything happens for a reason,” and “When one door closes another one opens,” or even a favorite song lyric or line from a poem. “This mantra can bring you a smidge of relief and remind you that things will get better, even if they are gloomy right now,” Parisi says.

2. Pay less attention to negative thoughts.

Ever found yourself lost in a loop of worry and concern? Tend to overanalyze everything? That’s called rumination, which is the process of continually thinking about the same dark scenario. Learning to recognize those thoughts for what they are—just thoughts—can aid you in pulling yourself together. As Lady O wrote in the June 2018 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, “Everything passes if you learn to hold things lightly.”

3. Be kind to yourself.

Cut yourself some slack when something difficult—losing a job, going through a breakup, or experiencing trauma—happens in your life. “These situations are painful. You’re most likely not going to feel perky and peppy about it all, and that’s okay,” Eckler says. Trying to squash the stress or grief will only intensify those feelings. Let yourself feel and show yourself the same compassion and support you would give a friend.

4. Change your language.

Words make a big difference in how you feel and in the way others perceive you. “One of the biggest ways we transfer stress is verbally,” explains Michelle Gielan, a happiness researcher and author of the book *Broadcasting Happiness*. “So jump-starting a conversation with a positive statement can set the tone in a different place.”

For example, when someone at work asks how you are, instead of saying, “I’m so stressed and busy!” try something light-hearted like, “I just had the best turkey and avocado sandwich for lunch. How’s your day going?” This can naturally lead the conversation—and your mind—to a more positive place.

5. Start a daily gratitude practice.

Research shows that expressing gratitude can increase joy,

which in turn can increase gratitude. “Now that’s a great cycle to get stuck in,” Eckler says. Begin by simply jotting down three things you are thankful for each day, even if it’s just in the notes section of your phone. Gruman points to studies that show that this intervention—and similar ones like writing a letter to someone who’d been particularly kind to them—enhances happiness. You could even expand the cycle of gratitude and kindness, by texting daily positive affirmations to loved ones.

6. Go outdoors.

Spending time in nature has been proven to boost positive thinking. If going outside for a stroll isn’t an option, try adding more indoor plants around your workplace or even watching nature scenes on YouTube whenever anxiety or stress builds up. In one study, people who viewed a stress-inducing film were later exposed to either shots of nature or of urban life. The result? Those who spent time peering over Mother Nature’s beauty recovered from stress more quickly.

7. Consider meditation.

Though it’s become a cliché recommendation, setting aside time to practice mindfulness and meditation plays a big part in becoming more positive, Eckler notes. “Being mindful for just a few minutes a day teaches us that everything changes, making it easier to have hope in dark moments,” she explains. “This will also help strengthen your practice of observing—but not always giving into—the negative thoughts your brain likes to conjure. Need a place to start? [Try one of these meditation apps](#).

8. Journal about your “best self.”

Grab a cute journal to get started with this writing exercise that involves imagining your best possible self in the future to zero in on the characteristics you’ll need to achieve that ideal. “Once you have that image in mind, take 10 to 15 minutes to write about it in detail, imagining what life will look like once you’ve achieved that state,” Eckler explains. Several studies have found that the more you write about an improved version of yourself, the more likely you are to become it.

9. Practice random acts of kindness.

Volunteering can boost happiness and make you feel fulfilled, Parisi notes. Can’t commit to a regular volunteer job? Even a small act of kindness can have a similarly uplifting effect. Donate old clothes, books, or furniture; spend money on gifts that give back; pay for the cup of coffee of the person behind you in line; donate blood; help out with coronavirus relief efforts. “By doing something kind for a stranger, you’re proving to yourself that kindness exists in the world. You never know when you’ll be on the receiving end,” Parisi says.

10. Exercise regularly.

Get moving if you want your mood to shift. Research about the connection between exercise and your emotions shows that being active will help you be happier and healthier. You don’t need to train for a marathon to reap the benefits. Even squeezing in a 10-minute walk or a quick yoga session while working from home has been shown to make an impact.

11. Don’t try so hard!

This might sound like a contradictory point to end on, but according to Gruman, taking off some of the pressure to be happy may help you become more positive overall. He conducted a study that assessed people’s “need for happiness” and the research found that those with a higher need for it actually felt less happy than those with a lower need for it.

Bottom line:

Think of happiness as a byproduct of living an engaged life, Gruman suggests. “Unlike making money, which can be fostered by analyzing one’s finances and trying to develop a plan to improve them, thinking about making ourselves happy can backfire,” he explains. “Don’t think about it so much—just do it.”

“Look at negative thoughts like reruns of a TV show you’ve seen a million times,” Eckler explains. “Let them play in the background while you shift your focus to something else. Think to yourself, ‘I’m noticing I’m having the thought that _____.’” As Eckler says, “I like to tell my mind, ‘Thanks for sharing!’ in a slightly sarcastic tone to acknowledge the thought. Then I move my attention elsewhere.”

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