

# REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

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## Keep on the Sunny Side: **Be an Optimist**

**A**re you an optimist? Read on to affirm your positive outlook. But what if the glass is half empty? If that's more your style, try to ignore those negative thoughts just long enough to read what follows and really ponder the benefits of optimism. Better yet, dare to believe the claim that you can learn to be an optimist.

### **Optimism defined**

Whether you believe optimists are born or made, you might want to know more about these silver lining people. First, understand that optimism isn't a clueless or unrealistic perspective, just one that hopes. Funk and Wagnalls' *Standard Dictionary* defines optimism as "a disposition to look on the bright side of things." In practical terms, an optimist can:

1. set and strive toward high goals
2. bounce back quickly from failure
3. consider negative circumstances as the exception, not the norm
4. look for the best in others



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Research supports that optimists enjoy these benefits as well:

1. longer lives
2. more effective immune systems
3. reduced likelihood of depression and anxiety

### **Learning to hope**

Perhaps something you just read about a rosier outlook appeals to you, but you feel trapped by your gloomy attitude. Don't despair and don't believe the negative tape that plays quietly, yet destructively, in your mind. You can think optimistically. You can head out to your car most mornings and have faith that it will start or turn on the shower and expect the hot water to work, right? The work in store for you is to apply this day-to-day simple faith to the deeper and more personal aspects of your life such as self-image, relationships, your life's purpose and tough times. The key is your willingness to examine your current thoughts (just the gloomy ones) and practice some new ones. If you catch yourself thinking something like, "What if I fail?" talk right back to that thought with "What if I don't?" or "I'll learn from it and press on." It might help to write down such pessimistic thoughts as they occur, then write the alternative thoughts that challenge them.

You can also:

1. Post encouraging notes in places where you usually tend to brood or complain.
2. Keep a journal of what went right each day.
3. Seek the company of optimists and study them, even try to mimic them.
4. Read books and watch movies with happy endings and believe them.
5. Compile a list of your blessings, including the ability to see, hear, walk, etc.

### **Life goes on, either way**

If your habitual mindset has you thinking that you can't change or that your circumstances are truly beyond a brighter perspective, consider working with a counselor or other mental health professional. A cognitive-behavioral psychologist might be just the person who can teach you how to retrain the thoughts that bring you misery. Bear in mind that, as automatic as your thoughts seem to be, you have the choice whether to accept or reject them. Shakespeare once penned, "A thing 'tis neither bad nor good, but thinking makes it so."

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