

News Column for Use Week of 2/3/2020

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1/30/2020

A Positive Attitude May Help You Live Longer

One secret to a long life is being optimistic. A positive attitude can help a person live longer. When armed with a sense of happiness and purpose, older adults are more apt to suppress negative thoughts and carry on as competent and productive members of society, regardless of age or ability.

The connection between the mind and body is strong. An overall positive attitude, including an upbeat outlook on life, can affect overall happiness, health, and well-being. Researchers continue to explore the effects of positive thinking and optimism on health. The benefits positive thinking may provide includes: lower rates of depression, lower levels of distress, greater resistance to the common cold, better psychological and physical well-being, reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease, and better coping skills during hardships and times of stress.

It is unclear why people who engage in positive thinking experience these health benefits. One theory is: having a positive outlook enables you to cope better with stressful situations, which reduces the harmful health effects of stress on your body. Overall, positive and optimistic people tend to live healthier lifestyles. They are more physically active, follow a healthier diet, do not smoke or drink alcohol in excess, have a sense of purpose feeling driven, have the energy to get things done, or to accomplish goals. Being more positive throughout life causes less stress and enables people to live healthier, happy lives.

Researchers examined long-term surveys of more than 69,000 women and 1,400 men. Both groups reported how optimistic they were: whether they expected good or bad things to happen to them in the future, and if they felt in control of important aspects of their life. The study monitored women who were an average age of 70 for 10 years. The men were an average age of 62 years old at the beginning of the study and were monitored for 30 years.

The men and women who were still living at the end of the study were the most optimistic people. They survived 10-15 percent longer than the least optimistic. The most optimistic people also had a better chance of living to age 85. Similar patterns held even after accounting for other factors that could have influenced their optimism and survival – how healthy they were in the beginning of the study, whether they were depressed, and their socioeconomic status.

Being able to accept and adapt to change plays an important role in having a positive optimistic attitude, especially dealing with life's challenges. A positive attitude allows a person to meet such challenges both good and bad with less resistance. A person is more open to learn from mistakes, research what it is you may want or see the possibility of new or better opportunities. No matter what challenges you face or what life throws at you, you can always work on choosing to be happy. Life is short. Make happiness a choice!