

The Power of Self-Talk

How you speak to yourself impacts your workout, strength, confidence, happiness and even your ability to shed pounds.

What would make you happy? A new wardrobe, a faster car, moving to a different city? People often think these things are the key to feeling good, but experts say only about 10% of a person's happiness is related to them. Much more happiness—90%—has to do with your general outlook on life. You can learn a lot about your own worldview by paying attention to "self-talk"—the conversation you have in your head about yourself and the world around you. Even more important, changing how you talk to yourself can actually help shift your perspective, too. Here's how.



The health benefits of positive self-talk

Researchers continue to explore the effects of positive self-talk and optimism on health. Health benefits that positive self-talk may provide include:

- Increased lifespan
- 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
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

Identifying negative self-talk

Not sure if your self-talk is positive or negative? Here are some common forms of negative self-talk:

Filtering

- You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones.

Personalizing

- When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself. For example, you hear that an evening out with friends is canceled, and you assume that the change in plans is because no one wanted to be around you.



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Catastrophizing

- You automatically anticipate the worst. The drive-through coffee shop gets your order wrong, and you automatically think that the rest of your day will be a disaster.

Polarizing

- You see things only as either good or bad. There is no middle ground. You feel that you have to be perfect or you're a total failure.

Focusing on positive self-talk

You can learn to turn negative thinking into positive thinking. The process is simple, but it does take time and practice. Here are some ways to think and behave in a more positive and optimistic way:

Identify areas to change

- If you want to become more optimistic and engage in more positive thinking, first identify areas of your life that you typically think negatively about, whether it's work, your daily commute, or a relationship. You can start small by focusing on one area to approach in a more positive way.

Check yourself

- Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.

Be open to humor

- Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times. Seek humor in everyday happenings. When you can laugh at life, you feel less stressed.

Follow a healthy lifestyle

- Exercise at least three times a week to positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet to fuel your mind and body. And learn techniques to manage stress.

Surround yourself with positive people

- Make sure those in your life are positive, supportive people you can depend on to give helpful advice and feedback. Negative people may increase your stress level and make you doubt your ability to manage stress in healthy ways.



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Practice positive self-talk

- Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about you.

Here are some examples of negative self-talk and how you can apply a positive thinking twist to them:

Negative Self-Talk	Positive Self-Talk
I've never done it before; what if I fail?	It's an opportunity to learn something new.
It's too complicated.	I'll tackle it from a different angle.
I'm too lazy to get this done.	When I finish this, I will feel good about myself.
There's no way this will work.	I will try and make it work.
I'm not going to get any better at this.	I'll give it another try.

The process of shifting your language is a lot like getting in shape. If your muscles haven't worked in a while, it's going to be uncomfortable at first. However, adopting a more positive language and worldview can pay off. People who focus on the present and appreciate what they have today are happier, more energetic, and more hopeful. Happier thoughts could give you fewer things to feel bad about.

