



# GLASS HALF...

... Full or empty? If you always choose the latter, you could be short-changing your health. Aoife Stuart-Madge reveals how to master your mind for a total life upgrade

If you're a glass-half-empty kind of girl, you probably brush off the positive thinking philosophy as well, putting misfortunes down to lousy timing, poor decisions or old-fashioned bad luck. But astounding new research claims that those with a positive outlook on life are not only more likely to live a fuller, happier life, chances are they'll live a longer one, too.

The study published in the journal *Aging* claims that happy people tend to live longer – and those who rack up 100-plus years have the sunniest dispositions of all. A previous study from the Mayo Clinic indicated that positive thinking could help to cut your risk of an early death by around 50 per cent, while findings from Carnegie Mellon University showed that positive people are more likely to be healthier.

But it's not just in fighting off sickness and old age that positivity can make its mark, it can also help you achieve your life goals. 'Positive thought is incredibly powerful,' says therapist Marisa Peer ([marisapeer.com](http://marisapeer.com)). 'Positive thoughts can overcome adversity, illness and take you right to the top, because what you think, you tend to believe.'

## Mind your language

To start thinking on the bright side, examine your inner dialogue. 'What we say to ourselves has an amazing impact on how we feel and what we do,' says Julie Hurst, a psychotherapist, hypnotherapist and life coach ([worklifebalancecentre.org](http://worklifebalancecentre.org)). 'Calling yourself names – "I'm so stupid for doing that"; "I was an idiot then"; "I'm such a loser"; "I'm just fat" – is destructive. We would never speak to our friends that way, so why is it acceptable when speaking to yourself?'

This kind of self-sabotage can ebb away at your confidence and derail your goals. 'Negative thoughts can really stop you in your tracks,' says Dr Catherine Hood, a women's health specialist from the Simplyhealth Advisory Research Panel ([sharppanel.co.uk](http://sharppanel.co.uk)). 'If you feel under confident about your own abilities or feel unmotivated then it's easier to avoid a difficult situation than it is to face it.'

Take that new diet plan that you've been trying to stick to – if you could only curb your chocolate addiction. 'If you think you'll never be able to lose weight then why bother going through the difficult first few days of a diet?' says Dr Hood. 'If you tell yourself you can do it, and that this is your choice to improve your life, it's a lot easier to stick to your guns rather than give into temptation.'

To further improve your willpower, Dr Hood suggests swapping pessimistic phrases such as, 'I can't have that piece of chocolate' for authoritative phrases like, 'I don't want to have that piece of chocolate.' 'Can't', 'shouldn't' and 'not allowed' imply that some external power is forbidding you from behaving in a particular way,' explains Dr Hood. 'The reality is that only you can change your life. If you want the chocolate then you can have it, but think of the reasons you want to lose weight. Making positive choices will help to boost your willpower.'

## Manage your goals

Sometimes, however, a goal seems so insurmountable that you can't help giving in to that niggling feeling that it will never happen, like that big promotion you've been angling for. But instead of telling yourself that it's out of reach, break your goal down into a few more achievable steps.

'"Never" is a horrible word as it takes away all hope. It implies that you won't succeed no matter how hard you try, so why bother. And it's also often untrue,' says Dr Hood. 'It's important the goals you set are realistic. If you set the bar too high then you won't achieve it and all you'll feel is a sense of

**'MAKE A LIST OF THE THINGS YOU WANT, AND MAKE SURE THE WORDING IS POSITIVE'**

PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK

“  
‘I’m ready and good enough to have the life I love, now’  
”

“  
‘I am enough. I am attractive enough and intelligent enough’  
”

“  
‘I am wonderful just by being me’  
”

## 3 OF THE BEST POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

failure. Setting realistic goals can be really motivating, particularly if you give yourself praise for achieving them.'

It's a strategy that is working for Jenny Diamond, 30, an auditor from Belfast, who is currently vying for a promotion. 'I kept telling myself that I'll never get promoted because there is too much competition and too few opportunities,' says Jenny. 'But instead of just giving up, I thought about what might increase my chances of career development. I volunteered for a challenging work project that made me stand out from the crowd and allowed me to network with some people beyond my immediate work stream. Now there's a new promotion board coming up and I'm feeling more confident as I know I have plenty of examples of my competence to draw on in the interview.'

Of course, none of us are completely immune to moments of self-doubt, and

it's perfectly normal to have a confidence wobble every now and then – just as long as you don't let those moments of negativity control you. The trick is to ignore your negative thoughts and act on your positive thoughts. Easier said than done, right?

Not necessarily, according to Phil Parker, a hypnotherapist and NLP practitioner and author of *The 10 Questions to Ask for Success* (£10.99, Hay House). He suggests making your positive thoughts more tangible by putting them on paper. 'Make a list of the things you want, and make sure the wording is positive,' Phil says. If your goal is to improve

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your love life, for example, write 'I am loveable' not, 'I don't want to be alone'. 'Visualise those goals coming your way and start making an action plan for how you are going to get those things,' Phil adds. 'Finally, take the first step of your action plan.' This could be as simple as agreeing to let a friend set you up on a blind date.

## Train your brain

Unfortunately, some negative thoughts can be trickier to control than others – especially when they fool the brain into perceiving imaginary problems. You know that hot guy you were afraid to talk to in case you stammered and blushed? That was negative thinking letting your imagination run wild. What about the time you refused to speak up in a meeting in case your idea got laughed out of the room? Again, negative thinking was at play. Steve Tromans, founder of Just be Well ([justbewell.com](http://justbewell.com)), has a few pointers to help you win the war against negativity. 'Close your eyes and think ahead to a place where typically you would be engaged in negative thought patterns,' he says. It might be imagining your ideas being scoffed at in a meeting. 'Imagine you are looking at a tiny you in a tiny, distant situation. Visually distancing the thought tends to diminish the emotion attached to it. You are giving yourself a sense of perspective here, literally.'

Next, suggests Steve, rewrite the scenario in your mind. Picture yourself again, only this time, your bosses are nodding in agreement at your ideas. 'See yourself engaging in the new behaviour, radiant and happy. Then finally step into the thought and imagine it.'

It's also important to ease up on yourself when you do let inner doubts creep in. 'We all think silly things from time to time. Learn to let go,' says Steve. 'Talk to yourself more kindly and supportively; breathe, and smile at your reflection. There is always a way out of a negative thought pattern.'