

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

## Optimists Are Healthier

*Is your glass half full or half empty? The answer can have a dramatic impact on your well-being and quality of life, say researchers.*

*As a holistic provider of health care, Dr. Gravesen acknowledges a strong link between a person's attitude and his or her physical and mental health.*



### An Optimist's Outlook

Studies prove what Dr. Gravesen has known all along: Optimists have a “generalized positive expectancy about the future.” (*Health Psychol* 2004;23:339-44.)

Dr. Gravesen notes that optimists don't spend their days fretting over “spilled milk.” Instead, they focus on maintaining control of their *responses* to the negative things happening around them.

“People with a positive outlook tend to have better morale and a greater adaptive capacity. Because they are more resilient in the face of stress, adversity, or loss, they actually suffer less: even in the worst circumstances.” (*Harv Ment Health Lett* 2002;18:NA.)

Optimistic people also report a higher quality of life and adopt more health-promoting behaviors than pessimists (*Psychosom Med* 2004;66:640-4).

### The Health Benefits of Seeing the Silver Lining

The positive attitude described in the previous section can do more than just make you more content — it can have a dramatic impact on your health. Read on to find out how happy leads to healthy.

#### Live Longer

In a study of 830 patients, researchers at the Mayo clinic found that pessimists had a 19 percent higher death rate than their optimistic counterparts (*Mayo Clin Proc* 2000;75:140-3).

Nearly a decade ago, researchers in the Netherlands decided to take a closer look at how optimism affects longevity, particularly as it relates to cardiovascular disease. Toward that end, they enrolled 941 subjects with cardiovascular disease (466 men and 475 women between the ages of 65 and 85) in a nine-year study.

The results of the study, published three months ago, show that optimistic patients do, indeed, have a higher survival rate than their pessimistic peers. And not just in relation to cardiovascular disease, but “all-cause mortality in old age.” (*Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2004;61:1126-35.)

In another study, researchers studied the journal entries — written over a period of 60 years — of 180 Catholic nuns. The researchers found that “those nuns who chronicled positive

emotions in their twenties lived markedly longer than those who recounted emotionally neutral personal histories.” (*Sci News* 2001;159:324.)

#### Kick Cardiovascular Disease

When the walls of the carotid arteries become lined with plaque — a condition referred to as carotid artery disease — blood flow to the brain, eyes and other vital above-the-neck destinations is restricted. If the blockage is mild, symptoms can include dizziness, feeling faint or partial blindness. A complete blockage results in stroke or death.

In another study, 209 middle-aged, healthy, premenopausal women received carotid artery scans. The scans were repeated 10.4 years and 13.5 years later, when the women were at least five years post-menopausal. The results showed that “optimistic women are less likely to show progression of carotid disease in mid-life than are pessimists.” (*Psychosom Med* 2004;66:640-4.)



**Katie Gravesen, DC, Sol Chiropractic (808) 270-2530  
30 E Lipoa #4-102, Kihei, HI 96753 [www.solchiro.com](http://www.solchiro.com)**

### **Prevent Pain**

Optimists may also suffer from less pain than their grumpier peers.

That's what researchers concluded after studying 659 men. The optimists in the group rated their general health, vitality and mental health levels higher than the pessimists. They also had lower levels of bodily pain (*Ann Behav Med* 2000;22:127-30).

### **Increase Your Immunity**

Pessimism can weaken the immune system, opening the door to a variety of diseases.

In one study, pessimists were found to have "lower concentrations of immunoglobulin A (IgA), one of the chemicals that is vital for an effective immune response." (*Harv Ment Health Lett* 2002;18:NA.)

### **How to See the Glass Half Full**

Now you know the power of an optimistic outlook, but how can you adopt a sunny disposition while battling all the stressors of today's hectic lifestyles? First, it's important to distinguish between depression and pessimism, and then to realize there are steps you can take to go from pessimistic to positive.

### **Know Pessimism vs. Depression**

Although the terms are often used synonymously, pessimism and depression are not the same thing.

Pessimism is a lifestyle. A pessimistic person is pessimistic 24 hours a day, 365 days a year because he or she chooses to be. Dr. Seuss' grumpy, green Grinch is a good example.

On the other hand, Winnie the Pooh's donkey friend Eeyore is depression personified. Depression is not a choice. It may be sparked by trauma, short- or long-term illness or other biological events. Depression is also linked to prescription drugs, such as interferon-based therapy for chronic hepatitis C (*Cleve Clin J Med* 2004;71 Suppl 3:27-32).

### **Change Your Mindset**

So how does a pessimist learn to focus on the silver linings and not the dark clouds? One word at a time.

The first step is to clean up all internal vocabulary, replacing negative phrases like "I can't..." with "I can ..." and other positive words. The next step is to improve all external vocabulary: what's said to others (*Physician Exec* 2001;27:68-71).

Next, pessimists need to identify the things in life that they can control.

After questioning 1,220 men and 1,242 women, researchers in the Netherlands found that those who felt they had little control over events in their life had a potentially higher risk of ill health and death (*Br Med J* 1999;319:1469).

As to the million and one things in life that can't be controlled, the secret is to learn acceptance. Prayer, mediation and other stress-relieving techniques can help pessimists (and even optimists) deal with life's negatives in a positive way.

Finally, pessimists need to get in the habit of practicing what psychologists call "reframing." When a negative event happens, concentrate on its positive aspects (you may have to dig to find them, but they are generally there).

For instance, rather than harping on the cost and hassle of repairing a flat tire, concentrate on being grateful that the tire did not blow out in the middle of a high-speed highway, where the event might have been deadly.

### **Let Us Help**

This office is committed to helping patients adopt the **chiropractic lifestyle**, a way of life that focuses on preventing health problems, rather than merely masking symptoms with medication (side effects of which may increase anxiety and depression).

Along these lines, the doctor coaches patients on developing the attitudinal component of the chiropractic lifestyle, one that is founded on optimism.

Don't just think about your health when you're sick — keep disease at bay everyday. Start by talking to the doctor about staying happy to stay healthy.

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