



# You Are What You Think

## An optimistic outlook can enhance your health, your work and your daily life.

Research shows that 90% of your happiness is determined by your mind set, meaning only 10% is affected by external factors – be that your job, finances or health. It might be hard to believe, but happiness and contentment have as much to do with how you perceive life as anything else. Whether it's aging, an approaching lifestyle change as retirement nears, or a general waning of zest for life, there's a wealth of research and ideas that suggest a more optimistic outlook is within your reach.

### STAY POSITIVE TO FEEL HEALTHIER AND YOUNGER

For your parents, reaching those middle and senior ages may have meant a significant change in lifestyle – stepping back from their career and less physical activity – but current and future generations have different prospects. These days, people know more about what's needed to stay healthy and know that new hobbies, careers or athletic achievements can happen at any age. According to a recent study by researchers from Yale University and University of California, Berkeley, you are actually only as old as you think you are (hear us out). Participants who were exposed to positive ideas and associations with aging – such as words like wise and spry – were found to have a greater improvement in their physical health than participants of a similar study that involved six months of prescribed exercise! Think triathlons are a thing of your past? Think again.

### THE OLDER RUNNER THAT COULD

In 2011, Arthur Gilbert became the oldest triathlete when he completed the Burnham-on-Sea triathlon at age 90. He completed his first triathlon at age 68.

Other research suggests that in many ways, our brains actually improve with age. As we accumulate experiences, our innovation and creativity are boosted as we're able to think bigger and

make important mental connections. With more life experience also comes greater maturity and awareness, giving us a keen understanding of what's truly important so we don't waste time sweating the small stuff.

### STAY POSITIVE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

So often we make the mistake of thinking that by first reaching our goals (like getting that promotion or raise), we can then find happiness, but research shows us that the opposite is actually true. When MET Life took a look at its sales people, they found such great results from those who were happier that they decided to start hiring people who were optimistic over those who showed higher intelligence or more experience. In the first year, the happier salespeople outsold their colleagues by 19%, and by 57% in the second year.

Shawn Achor – an expert on positive psychology and a notable Harvard professor – supports this idea in his TED talk, sharing that your brain is 31% more productive when it's positive, versus negative, neutral or stressed. In his research and consulting work, he's found that these easy habits are proven to shift your mindset toward the positive: Think of three things you're thankful for every day

- Journal about positive experiences to relive them
- Exercise (endorphins are always a good idea)
- Meditation helps your brain focus in an overstimulating world
- Random acts of kindness make everyone feel good

### DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE LITTLE THINGS

When we think of what might make us the happiest, our mind might jump to the loftiest ideas: extravagant holidays or a big house. But research from The Journal of Consumer Research suggests that's not necessarily the case.

In the study, participants were asked to recall enjoyable experiences, which included ordinary things that happened more frequently – such as a good meal or visit with family – and extraordinary things, which were rarer and included things like exotic holidays. What they found was that the older the participant, the more joy they experienced from ordinary pleasures, eventually growing to match the joy we get from novel experiences.

Whether you're still saving for retirement or already in it, this is a great reminder that your lifestyle can be a rich one whether you're cruising the Caribbean or living a more modest day-to-day. There are lots of small ways to polish your perceptions or just make more time for simple joys that lead to great contentment. Here are some of our favourites:

1. Read something physical. If you've gotten used to reading or watching your news on a screen, give your eyes a break one day a week and grab a newspaper or read a book at your local coffee spot.
2. Take an excursion to your local park. Greenery and sun are proven mood boosters.
3. Visit the library or a local bookshop. Don't forget about this wonderful public resource. Browse through the shelves and discover a new book or track down an old favourite.
4. Join a club. Card games or book clubs are a great way to spark easy conversation with new or old friends and fitness clubs are a great way to socialise while getting fit.
5. Enjoy a meal. Many of us have at least one of those meals a day that we totally rush through. Take your time! Try making pasta from scratch or enjoying a leisurely morning with your coffee and toast, outside in the fresh air if possible.

Regardless of your age or budget, your lifestyle and well-being can be as good as you believe them to be. Whatever your goals are for your career, health or retirement, surrounding yourself with people you care about and filling your time with simple joys can go a long way in giving you the positive boost you need.

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Sources: Huffington Post, NYTimes.com, Business Insider, Telegraph.com, TED.com, CNN.com, Liveboldandbloom.com