

Optimists' Approach to Stress Makes Them Healthier

Decades of research has shown that optimists are healthier than pessimists, but there are conflicting opinions about the reasons behind this increased health. What exactly makes optimists so healthy? One key explanation involves their approach to disappointment and setbacks. Instead of getting discouraged and giving up, optimists' rosy outlook allows them to forge ahead and tackle problems with the belief that they will overcome obstacles. Optimists are simply better at dealing with stress.

Everyone encounters stress in life, from bad grades and lost jobs to deaths and illnesses. These stressors are simply part of the human experience, but not everyone approaches them the same way. One study published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Review* examined this very topic. The study looked at how pessimists and optimists varied in their approach to major and minor stressors.

When pessimistic people encountered a stressful situation, the study found they were more likely to withdraw and avoid or ignore the problem. With health issues, in particular, this can be a significant risk. When a pessimist notices a troubling symptom, he or she may choose to ignore it or avoid talking or thinking about it. However, these troubling symptoms can be life-threatening. Even if they aren't related to serious conditions, they can affect quality of life and overall health. Similarly, ignoring or avoiding stressors like job losses or setbacks that are not directly related to physical health can compound the mental health impact of these problems.

In contrast, the study found that optimists were more likely to use approach strategies designed to solve the problems and minimize their negative impact. Optimists were also likely to change their strategies if the initial approach didn't seem to work. When it comes to physical health issues, this could mean getting a second opinion, trying a different treatment, or looking at the problem from a new angle. When used with other life stressors, this problem-solving approach can also reduce stress by better solving the challenge and by giving the individual the sense that he or she is an agent in the situation.

This study offers important information for both optimistic and pessimistic people. Adopting a more optimistic outlook to solving problems and managing stressful situations can not only make you happier - it can make you healthier too.