

Embracing a Positive Attitude... The Key to Longevity

Do positive people live longer? A growing body of evidence shows that they may. I have had the good fortune of knowing several elderly people in my life, including my very independent ninety-six year old grandmother who still lives in her home on her own. I often wonder about the secret to her ability to maintain a happy and productive life. Despite the loss of her husband 25 years ago, a battle with cancer, arthritis pain, and the everyday turmoil that goes along with having 5 children, 13 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren, she is still a positive and inspiring conversationalist.

One common thread with the elderly that have touched my life is that they have adopted an attitude of gratitude as well as being positive thinkers. Is this way of looking at life a key to successful aging and living to these ripe old ages? The reports of a study recently published by the Mayo Clinic involving the psychiatric evaluation of 800 people in 1960 and determining 197 of them to be pessimists concluded 45 years later, that the risk of death for a pessimistic person is 19% greater for any given year.

Optimistic people rebounded from a crisis by counting their blessings, and embracing the love and friendships in their lives rather than getting stuck in the cycle of negative thoughts and feelings. Pessimists may not expect to live a long and healthy life and their body may well arrange things to make it so. Even your attitude towards aging affects your longevity.

American researchers from the Department on Epidemiology and Public Health at Yale University conducted a study to determine how a positive self-perception on aging affected an individual's health. This community based study was comprised of 660 men and women aged 50 and older. The researchers found that individuals who had a positive outlook towards aging lived up to 7.5 years longer than those who begrudged getting older.

Filling your life with optimism and positive feelings is often easier said than done. As we enter a new decade, resolving to make emotional changes in your life is just as important as setting goals of exercise and healthy eating. Taking the following few steps can go a long way in adding some precious years, and improving the quality of your day to day life.

- Count your blessings and focus on all the good fortune in your life and the people, things and events you have to be grateful for
- Choose your company carefully and surround yourself with positive people, books, television shows, movies, nature, music and art that inspire you.

- When something stressful comes into your life, look for ways to see it differently. Seek to find how you might grow personally from the experience and be a stronger person for having gone through it.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. When a crisis pops up in life, as we all know will from time to time, take a step back and evaluate it. Is it worth getting worked up about and is getting upset over the matter going to help you or the situation?

Choosing to focus your emotional energy where it can result in positive improvements will reduce your stress and improve your circumstances. There are many books available filled with additional easy techniques you can apply to your life to learn how to look on the bright side. Having a positive outlook on life is a choice. It may not come naturally for many people, but there is always time to learn to change and improve. May your glass be half full in 2010 and beyond.