

IT TRULY PAYS TO STAY POSITIVE! According to a large Yale University survey, being optimistic in middle age increases life span by at least 7.5 years -- even after accounting for age, gender, socioeconomic status, and physical health. The "happy" participants in the study have learned to minimize the destructive effects of stress. "Of course, optimists get stressed," says David Snowdon, a professor of neurology at the University of Kentucky who studies aging. "But they automatically turn the response off much more quickly and return to a positive mental and physical state." Here are four habits that longevity experts say are at the heart of a sunny disposition--and that you can adopt, too.

1. PEOPLE WHO SOCIALIZE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK are more likely to live longer, keep their brains sharp, and prevent heart attacks. Call a friend today!

2. THEY EXPRESS GRATITUDE (WITHIN REASON)

BUOY YOUR spirits by recording happy events on paper, your computer, or a PDA. People who write about all the things they are thankful for are optimistic about the upcoming week and more satisfied overall with their lives, according to a University of California, Davis, study.

3. THEY'RE RANDOMLY KIND

DO YOU PERFORM five acts of kindness in any given day? That's the number of good deeds that boosts your sense of well-being and happiness, according to research. Your karmic acts can be minor and unplanned--giving up your seat on the bus; buying an extra latte to give to a coworker. You'll find that the payback greatly exceeds the effort.

4. THEY REAPPRAISE THEIR LIVES

YES, YOU CAN rewrite history--and feel better about yourself in the bargain. Set aside a little time each week to write about or record--or even just mentally revisit--an important event in your past. Reflecting on the experience can reshape your perception of it, as well as your expectations for the future. "Even if a memory is painful, it's good to work through it," says Butler. "If you can come to terms with past events, you'll be better able to handle tough times down the road." So be honest, but also go easy on yourself. Remember: You are the heroine in this tale!

Happiness is not an accident. Nor is it something you wish for. Happiness is something you design."

Jim Rohn

***Margie Connolly,
Certified Personal Trainer
Wellness Coach***