

# Optimism and health narrative



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The power of positive thinking not only is effective in creating a sense of mental well being, there are now studies being conducted in using optimistic thinking in assisting people in keeping themselves physically well also. The power of the mind is a never-ending wonder; this author does not doubt that science will be tapping into the human mind longer than a lifetime. Using positive thinking to keep the mind in a state of well-being gives a person a sense of control of their own destiny and the trials and tribulations that are dealt to the human race at any given time or day.

When someone is challenged with a traumatizing event that may put him or her in a life-threatening situation, drawing on optimistic thinking will allow the person to handle the situation more efficiently and calmly (Taylor, et al, 2000). A study was conducted on women with breast cancer, the researchers were out to prove that distinguishing certain characteristics in optimistic thinking can lead to these women returning to their former active lives before being diagnosed with cancer.

The results of this study and the women interviewed were surprising, many of the women stated that they not only returned back to their former activity levels, but also were actually stronger. It was reported that many women felt a more sense of “ self”, re-prioritizing the importance of people and events in their lives. It was also reported that relationships with the people in their lives became their highest priority and their appreciation of the presence of family and friends in their lives (Taylor, et al, 2000).

Patients who use positive thinking are far more likely to live longer productive lives than those who do not. Another study was conducted on HIV

positive men that had experienced the loss of a loved one or friend to HIV. These men were asked to reflect on their grieving process and the impact this death had upon them. The study was conducted on grieving because the researchers knew that it had a negative impact on the immune system, for all people, healthy or not.

The results were based on the final interviews with the men; it was found that those who could find meaning or some positive aspect of the loss of someone were able to ward off negative impact on their illness. Those who could not get through the grieving process with some type of positive outcome were found to advance more quickly into their disease (Taylor, et al, 2000). The study also found that men that were depressed or in a negative state before they were asked to reflect on the grieving of their loved one showed more advancement in their illness.

The men who were unable to find meaning or a small positive outcome were retested on their HIV status and it was found that the number of cells involved in this illness had a noticeable decline as opposed to those who used positivism. The conclusion of these researchers was that those men who had found meaning in the grieving process seemed to have an invisible biological shield from their illness progressing quickly compared to those who did not find any meaning (Taylor, et al, 2000).

Research on the effects of optimism and one's physical health up until about the last ten years had been limited due to the inability to perform tests on an individual. However, with the advancement of modern medicine and the knowledge of today's scientists, testing on the physical repercussions of

positive thinking has proved that “ mind over matter” truly does exist. It does not cure terminal illness, but it permits the person to adapt to their illness with better coping mechanisms as well as allowing them to stall the advancement of their disease.

For those who have chronic conditions, but not fatal, such as arthritis, diabetes, or chronic pain optimistic thinking can help them adjust to living with a chronic condition and help alleviate the severity of their pain.

Reference: Taylor, S. E. , Kemeny, M. E. , & Reed, G. M. , Bower, J. E. , Gruenewald, T. L. (2000). Psychological Resources, Positive Illusions, and Health. *American Psychological Association, Inc.* , 55(1), 99-109.

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