

# Balanced Living

May 2023



## It's Time to Think Positive

Picture a rose bush in full bloom. What did you notice first: the roses or the thorns? A rose bush has plenty of both. But if you focused on the roses and overlooked the thorns, you were thinking positive.

There is a lesson here. Thinking positive is a choice. It's a decision to appreciate the roses in your life (loved ones, favorite activities, and relaxing moments) while letting go of the thorns (stresses, disappointments, and losses).

This doesn't mean pretending to be happy when you're not. If you're upset, it's important to deal with and talk about your feelings. Thinking positive means choosing to fill your mind with positive thoughts. Your reward will be a calmer, more hopeful attitude.

### The benefits of staying positive

"A positive outlook is necessary to prevent depression, to get along with others, and to feel better about yourself and your life," says psychologist Norman Abeles, Ph.D., past president of the American Psychological Association and an expert on mental health in seniors.

If you have health problems, it's important not to get stuck down in the dumps. "A negative attitude makes you feel worse physically. It increases your stress, which worsens your pain and drains your energy," says Dr. Abeles. On the other hand, "a positive attitude helps you relax and feel more competent" when dealing with everyday challenges.

Dolores Gallagher Thompson, Ph.D., director of the Older Adults and Family Center at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto, Calif., says older adults dealing with health problems become sad that they can't do everything they used to. At that point, some decide they can't ever be happy again. "I call thinking that starts spiraling downward 'pre-depression,'" she says. "When you start to feel this way, it's time to change your thinking. If you don't, eventually you will become depressed."

### How to change your mind

If you tend to count your worries instead of your blessings, it's time for a fresh approach. Here's how to start thinking more positively.

- **Reason with facts, not feelings.** Changes in your life can make you feel uncertain and anxious. You may then fear the worst. "Step back and get the facts," says Dr. Gallagher Thompson. "Talk to an expert, such as your doctor, and find out exactly what you can expect. Then ask yourself, 'If this was happening to somebody else, what advice would I give them?'"
- **Stay connected.** Keep in touch with friends and loved ones and be open to developing new friendships. Volunteering your time and keeping active in clubs or faith-based groups will help you focus on others more than yourself. "Spend time with positive people who are living active, fulfilled lives," says Dr. Abeles.
- **Plan for your happiness.** Schedule time for pleasant activities as often as possible. Having something to look forward to will keep your spirits up.
- **Become a problem-solver.** Don't just wish problems would go away. Take steps to solve them as quickly as possible, asking for support and help from others.
- **Find the silver lining.** Give yourself time to adjust to change or loss. Change can bring new opportunities: Be open to them. "Your life won't be the same, but it likely can be better than what you imagine," says Dr. Gallagher Thompson.



### Challenge your fear about getting older

From the time we are young, many of us dread growing older.

This is partly because negative images of seniors — as grumpy, disabled, and forgetful — are everywhere, from greeting cards to TV commercials, says Becca Levy, Ph.D., a Yale University psychologist and researcher of stereotypes related to aging. If you accept these negative images as true — and apply them to yourself — you may start believing you're less capable than you really are.

To fight these stereotypes, Dr. Levy suggests asking, "Does this idea really apply to me — or are there examples of older people who are different?" She adds, "Think about positive role models for successful aging, if not in your immediate circle, then in books you've read or movies you've seen."

Likewise, if you make a mistake or forget something, don't dismiss it as "just old age," advises Dr. Levy. "These negative phrases stay with us. The real reason for what you are experiencing could be only temporary — such as tiredness, hunger, or having a lot on your mind."

The bottom line: "Question your deeply held beliefs about aging and screen out the negative." You are what you believe you are. Give yourself credit for the wisdom and maturity you've gained through the years.

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## How to Catch the Happiness Habit

Everyone gets the blues occasionally, but people who can extricate themselves from a bad mood may have discovered the secret to happiness.

"The secret to having a happy life isn't to be constantly laughing, but to be able to bounce back from a bout with unhappiness, to use little tricks -- some happy habits -- to jump-start your mind and revitalize your energy," says Bix Bender, author of "7 Habits of Highly Happy People."

Mr. Bender gathered the following strategies on how to beat the blues from friends, neighbors and strangers. One or two of these happy habits may help lift your spirits the next time you're feeling down.

### Get that 'good tired' feeling

"When you exercise, you're doing something for yourself -- your body, mind and spirit," Mr. Bender says. "After a day of strenuous activity, such as cleaning house or gardening, you're probably tired -- but it's a good tired. This feeling has to do with the fact you did something that needed doing, but it also means your mind and body worked together in a pleasing way."

### Try a little comfort food

Satisfying your cravings in a healthful way can comfort a wounded spirit. Try these recipes for happiness:

- Make some homemade bread. Pound and knead the dough as though it were all your problems. Eat a couple of slices while the bread is still warm from the oven.
- Or prepare yourself for a tough day by getting up early enough to have a long, leisurely and filling breakfast. This small pleasure can help you keep your head up in the hours ahead.
- Or call some friends and invite them to dinner. You'll be too busy preparing the meal to stay depressed.

### Do something you like

You may be able to jump-start happiness by doing something for yourself that makes you smile. To make your day happier:

Write down the words to an inspirational song or poem and tape the piece of paper where you'll see it every day. Use it to remind yourself of how you want to live your life.

- Go to a sporting event-the cheering will boost your mood.
- Turn up your car stereo and sing along at the top of your lungs.
- Draw a beautiful, peaceful, happy scene.

### Spend time in nature

"The great outdoors can soothe the spirit and inspire happiness," Mr. Bender says. To learn from nature:

- Have a special wild spot -- a lake, park or forest where you can go for restoration.
- Grow something. It doesn't matter if you tend to a whole garden, a tree or a bean in a paper cup.
- Walk barefoot in the grass or on the beach.

### Spread happiness

Doing things for others helps you get your mind off your troubles. To spread the happiness habit around:

- Do something to make someone smile.
- Do a favor for someone without being asked.

### Enjoy the little things

"A person doesn't become happy in big gushes and explosions," Mr. Bender says. "Someone who feels good about life builds happiness one little moment at a time, one decision at a time, one smile at a time." To acknowledge life's small pleasures:

Think about those you love and those who love you.  
Spend time with positive people.

Find happiness in little things -- smelling freshly cut grass, making it to the gas station before your car runs out of gas, saying hello to a stranger and having the person smile back.

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### **Webinar Now Available:**

#### **The Science of Happiness**

Learn how to bring more happiness to your personal and professional life. Research supports that happy people feel better, do better, and live better. While this is great news, it still begs the question, why? And more importantly, how? During this webinar, we will explore the history and research behind this concept of happiness, how it relates to the various facets of your life, and what intentional activities you can do to increase your life satisfaction and fulfillment. There are many pathways to happiness, so let's get your journey started!

[Log-in](#) any time this month to watch the webinar!

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## How to Protect Your Emotional Wellbeing

Maintaining your emotional wellbeing can feel like a balancing act at times. The uncertainty in the world over the past few years has affected people on many levels, including financial stability, family relationships and mental health. Here are some tips for protecting your emotional wellbeing:

**Remember Your Purpose:** Define what your purpose is and remind yourself of it each day.

**Re-Examine Your Direction in Life:** If you're unhappy with the work you're doing or the direction your life is headed, you could start considering other options. Brainstorm what changes you could make to improve your personal satisfaction and emotional wellbeing.

**Maintain Boundaries in Relationships:** It's important to maintain boundaries with others. This includes family members, friends, coworkers and anyone else you interact with. Boundaries can help strengthen relationships, as well as protect your sense of self and emotional state.

**Make Self-Care a Priority:** Consider what is important to you and make time for that, such as doing a yoga class, going for a walk or reading a book for leisure. You might feel like there aren't enough hours in the day, but most of us can carve out 10 or 20 minutes. Also, don't forget the importance of a good night's sleep.

**Limit Your Media Use:** Try spending less time scrolling on social media or the internet in general and instead, focus on actions you can take to better your own life. We all have limited time and mental bandwidth. Let's try our best to spend it with people we love and on things where we can affect the outcome.

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# The Wellness News

Tips and resources for living well

May 2023

## Mental Health Month

May is Mental Health Month, a time to raise awareness about mental health and the importance of caring for our mental wellbeing. Mental health is essential and this month puts the spotlight on mental wellness and encourages people to care for themselves and their loved ones.

### Why Mental Health Month Matters

**Mental illness is more common than you might think.** According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), approximately one in five adults in the United States experiences mental illness in a year. It can range from mild to severe and can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or background.

**Mental health is just as important as physical health.** Our psychological and physical health are interconnected; caring for one can improve the other. For example, we may experience physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and stomach problems when we neglect our mental health. By prioritizing our mental health and seeking support when needed, we can improve our overall wellbeing and reduce the risk of developing physical health problems.

**Access to mental health care is essential.** Mental Health Month seeks to raise awareness about mental health care's importance and reduce barriers to accessing care. By advocating for better mental health care and supporting organizations providing mental health services, we can help ensure everyone can access the care they need.

### How You Can Get Involved

**Educate yourself and others about mental health.** One way to get involved is to educate yourself and others. You can read books, articles, and attend workshops or webinars to learn more about mental health and how to care for yourself and your loved ones.

**Support mental health organizations.** Many organizations provide support and resources for people who experience mental illness. You can support these organizations by donating money, volunteering your time, or spreading awareness about their work on social media.

**Prioritize your mental health.** Taking care of your mental health is one of the most important things you can do. You can prioritize your mental health by practicing self-care, seeking help, and contacting friends and family for support.

Mental Health Month is necessary to raise awareness about the importance of caring for ourselves and others. Educating ourselves, supporting mental health organizations, and prioritizing our own mental health can help reduce stigma and improve access to mental health care for all.

Source: [Home | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)



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## Socializing with Friends Without Alcohol

For many people, socializing with friends often involves drinking alcohol. Whether it's going out to a bar or having drinks at home, alcohol has become a common way to socialize and connect with others. However, it's important to remember there are many other ways to enjoy time with friends. Not only can these activities be just as fun, but there are benefits to socializing without alcohol.

### Alcohol-Free Activities

**Plan activities that don't revolve around drinking.** One of the easiest ways to spend time with friends without alcohol is to plan activities that don't involve drinking. For example, visit an art exhibit, see a movie, try a new restaurant, attend a sporting event, or try a fitness class. Alcohol tends to make it feel easier to bond and connect with others, but connecting over a mutual activity will lead to a more meaningful connection.

**Be upfront with your friends about your preferences.** If you're trying to cut back on drinking or prefer not to drink, it's important to be upfront with your friends. Let them know you're happy to spend time with them but would rather not drink. You might find that some of your friends are also looking for alternatives to drinking and are happy to try out new activities with you. Like anything, you're more likely to succeed with a support system.

**Find like-minded people.** If you're struggling to find friends who are interested in spending time without alcohol, try branching out to find like-minded people. Joining a club or group that focuses on a particular interest can be a great way to meet new people who share your values and interests. For example, you could join a hiking group, a book club, or a sports team.

**Enjoy the benefits of socializing without alcohol.** There are many benefits to spending time with friends without alcohol. You'll likely have more meaningful conversations and make deeper connections. Without the distraction of alcohol, you may also have an easier time remembering the details of your conversations and developing stronger bonds with your friends.

Connecting with friends without alcohol is as fun and rewarding as socializing with alcohol. So, the next time you want to spend time with friends, try to think outside the box, explore some non-alcohol-related activities, and reap the benefits.



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## Women's Health

### Top 5 Health Concerns & How to Get Screened

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the top five leading causes of death in women are:

**Heart Disease.** Heart disease risk factors for women include diabetes, stress/depression, smoking, inactivity, and menopause. According to Mayo Clinic, symptoms in women can look different than in men. Therefore, it is important to know what to look for, i.e., neck/jaw/shoulder/arm(s) pain, nausea/vomiting, dizziness, sweating, heartburn, and fatigue.

**Cancer.** According to the American Cancer Society, some cancers that most often affect women are breast, colorectal, endometrial, lung, cervical, skin, and ovarian. Knowing your chances for each is essential to help reduce your risk of cancer.

**Stroke.** According to CDC, four out of five strokes are preventable. High blood pressure is the leading risk factor for stroke. Unique risk factors for women include hypertension during pregnancy, certain birth control medications, and depression.

**Chronic lower respiratory disease (CLRD).** CLRD is a group of conditions that affect the lungs, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other chronic conditions. Typical symptoms include shortness of breath, wheezing, increased mucus, chronic cough, racing heartbeat, and fatigue.

**Alzheimer's Disease.** According to Harvard Health, women are more prone to Alzheimer's than men, mainly because women live longer. Another reason may be that women's immune systems are more robust, and the amyloid plaque that causes Alzheimer's is part of the brain's immune system to fight infections.

Regular annual wellness exams with your primary care physician are vital for detecting these conditions early. Have open dialog regarding your family history, symptoms, and concerns. Your doctor will order appropriate bloodwork and additional tests which can provide clues to your current risk. Overall, it is important to have regular checkups and cancer screenings recommended by your doctor.

#### Sources:

[Leading Causes of Death – Females – All races and origins – United States, 2018 | CDC Women's Health](#)

[Cancer Facts for Women | Most Common Cancers in Women](#)

[Women and Stroke | cdc.gov](#)

[Why are women more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease? - Harvard Health](#)

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We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, well-being & legal issues.

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## Cucumber Salad with Honeydew & Burrata

### Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ teaspoons honey
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- 4 cups lightly packed baby arugula
- 4 cups cubed honeydew melon
- 1 ½ cups cucumber batons (2-inch)
- 1 burrata ball (3 ¾ ounces), sliced
- ¼ cup toasted pepitas

### Directions

1. Whisk lemon juice, oil, honey, salt, and pepper in a small bowl. Stir in basil.
2. Place the arugula in a large bowl. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the vinaigrette; toss to coat. Transfer to a platter. Scatter honeydew and cucumbers over the arugula; top with burrata slices.
3. Sprinkle pepitas over the salad, then drizzle with the remaining vinaigrette.

### Nutrition

**Vegetarian, Gluten-Free, Egg Free, Low Carb, Nut Free**

**6 Servings**

**Per Serving:**

Calories: **171** | Protein: **6g** | Carbohydrates: **15g** | Dietary Fiber: **2g** | Fat: **12g** | Saturated Fat: **4g** | Sodium: **188mg**

Source: [Cucumber Salad with Honeydew Melon & Burrata \(eatingwell.com\)](https://eatingwell.com/recipes/cucumber-salad-with-honeydew-melon-and-burrata/)



## Overcome Springtime Stressors

Springtime can include a surprising amount of stress. A menu of stressors typically includes final exam preparation, graduation planning and festivities, dating and relationship issues, loss of focus on school as it comes to an end, recreational pursuits, sport schedules, social events, college planning, and tough financial decisions. The big overlay is parenting challenges. If you're unfortunate enough to check all the stress boxes above this month, don't suffer physical and psychological effects. Pick up some tips from your EAP or other professional counseling resources. Anxiety or depression can affect you at any time of year, and some say May is one of the most challenging times.

## Mental Health Month: Practice Preventive Mental Health Care

There is such a thing as "preventive mental health," just like there is preventive physical health. Here's one approach: Practice self-compassion—be kind and understanding to yourself, especially during difficult times. Treat yourself with the same empathy and support that you would offer a close friend. And here's another: Establish healthy boundaries—set limits on your time, energy, and resources to avoid burnout and resentment. Learn to say no to requests that don't align with your values or goals. Preventive mental health lowers stress and builds resilience for when the going gets tough. Learn more in the workbook, "Better. Mental. Health. for Everyone" by Dr. Abraham Low.

## Get It Scheduled to It Get Done

If you create to-do lists that pile up without acting on them, you may accumulate to-do lists for days, weeks, or even months and be frustrated that so much is unaccomplished. The solution is scheduling. The phrase "If it doesn't get scheduled, it doesn't get done" is one of the most important concepts in time management. In short, if you don't set aside a specific time to do a task or complete a project, you are still at the mercy of procrastination and distraction. By scheduling your task, you commit yourself to prioritizing it and allocating the time needed to complete it. Try it to see if you move forward.

## Calling In Sick: There's EAP Help for That

There are many reasons employees call in sick when they are actually well, and some are associated with personal struggles or problems suitable for resolving with help from the EAP or other professional counseling. Have any of the following kept you away from work? 1) Personal or family issues requiring your attention. 2) Feeling burned out or overwhelmed by work. 3) Feeling undervalued and unexcited about your job. 4) Wanting to avoid a difficult or unpleasant work situation or person. 5) Needing a "mental health day" after an upsetting or emotional incident the day before. 6) Feeling over-stressed or being overcome with anxiety about a personal issue.

## Harvest Some Wellness with Indoor Gardening

The therapeutic and mental health benefits of gardening have been shown in numerous studies, but you don't need a garden plot, backyard, or even a patio to reap the benefits of this activity. You can get all the advantages of gardening by using just a pot or two on a windowsill. Benefits include improving your mood, reducing stress and anxiety, and gaining self-satisfaction, mindfulness, and a feeling of accomplishment from growing your own food and nurturing a plant and watching it flourish. This gardening-centered activity can boost self-esteem and help you feel more capable and in control. The easiest things to grow in a small pot include leafy greens and herbs, microgreens, and even beans. Varieties of leafy greens such as lettuce, spinach, arugula, and kale all can be grown in small pots. Herbs and peppers are other options. They require a moderate amount of sunlight and can be harvested continuously by picking the outer leaves as they grow. Vegetables grown indoors may not yield as much as those grown outdoors in a garden, but you will still get the fun and rewards that accompany gardening. Gardening requires a certain level of focus and attention, which can promote a sense of well-being. And focusing on the present moment and the task at hand may help alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Experiment to see what your green thumb can do. Source: Horticultural Therapy Association ([www.ahta.org](http://www.ahta.org))

## Go Ahead, Praise the Boss

Bosses need positive feedback too, but often they hear only problems and complaints. As they are resource experts and troubleshooters, it might feel counterintuitive to think they need support from subordinates. Positive feedback has a favorable impact on everyone, so it can add measurably to a positive workplace. Everyone benefits when that happens. Tips: 1) Express genuine appreciation and praise. Don't be insincere or patronizing. Be specific, not by saying, "Hey, you're an awesome boss," but by simply pointing out specific examples of how what they did made a difference. Be genuine—if you don't "feel it," take a pass. 2) There's no need to be drippy, emotional, or effusive. Simply share the observation. Hint: Be sure to complement your praise by being a good worker yourself, or the feedback you offer may be less appreciated.

## Emotional Labor and Customer Service Stress

"Emotional labor" refers to the practice of maintaining a positive attitude and friendly demeanor while working under stress, particularly with difficult and irate customers. Burnout risk is naturally high in such jobs, but a few healthy practices can dramatically improve your resilience. Practice each with awareness of its benefits. 1) Take care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally with enough rest, healthy eating, and regular exercise. 2) Practice focusing on the positive aspects of your job, such as helping customers and solving their problems. 3) Practice empathy with customers. It improves their demeanor and leads to positive interactions with you. 4) Use more positive language during interactions. It reduces tension, and it de-escalates conflict. 5) Seek support. Colleagues, supervisors, and your company EAP offer opportunities to vent, process events, and blow off steam. This is normal and healthy. It won't feed cynicism; it's just the opposite—it will help you stay positive and motivated in your job.

## Try the Pomodoro Technique

The "Pomodoro Technique" might be the ticket if you struggle with distractions and remaining focused on projects. Developed by Francesco Cirillo, a business consultant, the approach to managing time requires a kitchen timer and breaking work into short, focused intervals (typically 25 minutes) called "Pomodoros." Separate these with five-minute breaks. After four Pomodoros, take a longer break (15-30 minutes). The Pomodoro Technique helps you maintain focus and productivity, but it also helps you avoid burnout and mental fatigue from arduous tasks. There's a bonus; you eventually become more efficient at prioritizing tasks and avoiding distractions even when not using the technique.

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