

# Positive Thinking

## What is positive thinking?

There is a strong link between how we think and feel. If we think about something in a negative way, we are likely to also feel bad about it. If we try to think positively about an experience, our feelings will be more positive.

For example, imagine you're about to run a race. If you think, "Everyone expects me to win, if I don't my life is worth nothing" or "I always lose", you may feel pressured, anxious or hopeless. But if you think, "I love being fit", "I am proud of myself", or "I look forward to seeing what I'm capable of", your feelings are likely to be more positive. You may even run faster!

## What can you do about it?

The impact of negative thinking can vary. Sometimes it limits us from achieving what we want. Sometimes it can make life feel just about impossible to go on with. You do not have to struggle with these feelings on your own. There are services that can assist you, as well as things you can do to help yourself turn your negative ways of thinking into more helpful, positive approaches.

Here are some examples of common negative ways people say they think, and some ideas of ways you could try turn them around to be more positive, and therefore to feel better.

## Negative ways of thinking

### 'ALL OR NOTHING'

This is when you see things just in black and white. If our performance is not perfect, then we see ourselves as a complete failure.

**In the race:** With this way of thinking, coming second would be considered failure.



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### 'OVER-GENERALISING'

This is when we see just one bad event as an indication that we're a complete loser, and we will always fail. **In the race:** With this way of thinking, losing a race would make us think we would always fail.

### 'NEGATIVE LENS'

This is when we pick one negative aspect of a situation (maybe something really small) and look at our lives and ourselves through that experience, like looking through a camera lens that makes everything look bad. **In the race:** If we're not happy with our starting technique, or anything else, we take a negative approach to the whole race, and our lives.

### 'IT WAS JUST A FLUKE'

This is when we ignore or play down a positive experience as 'just a fluke', so that we can continue to think of ourselves in a negative way. **In the race:** With this way of thinking, we might consider a win as the result of something other than our own behaviour e.g. 'It was because the best runner was sick'.

### 'MIND READING'

This is when we assume that we understand a person's reaction to us as negative, even though they really haven't said or done anything to confirm this. **In the race:** With this way of thinking, we might think everyone else in the race doesn't like us, when they are just concentrating on trying to win too!

### 'IT'S ALL A DISASTER'

This is when we exaggerate the importance of our mistakes, no matter how small, and see them as a reflection of ourselves or our lives.

**In the race:** With this way of thinking, if we trip over when training for the race, we think this means we're going to lose, all is lost and our life is over.

### 'EMOTIONAL REASONING'

This is when we assume that our negative feelings about something are evidence that it is true.

**In the race:** With this way of thinking, if we wake up in the morning feeling pessimistic, we are convinced that this means that everything will turn out badly.

### 'SHOULD' STATEMENTS

This is when we tell ourselves that there is a 'right' way to do things, and feel guilty if we do not measure up. **In the race:** With this way of thinking, we might think, "I should train seven days a week", and feel guilty if we don't do it.

### 'LABELLING'

This is when, instead of just recognising when you make a mistake, you use it to give yourself a label that sums up who you are and how you feel about yourself. **In the race:** If you don't win, you describe yourself as 'a loser' or 'hopeless'.

### 'IT'S ALL MY FAULT'

This is when we feel that bad things that happen in the world are our fault, even when they seem to have little to do with us. **In the race:** If the race is rained out, we think, "it's because I was running today, I always bring bad luck."

## Ideas for thinking positive

Most things in life are not black or white. We can learn from our mistakes, and usually find things that we have done well in any situation. The fact that we competed could be considered an achievement. And there's always the next race.

We can learn from most experiences, good or bad. We can reflect on why they happened, and changes we want to make for next time.

**In the race:** We could think about our training, what shoes we'll wear or what to eat next race.

Nobody's perfect. We all have both strengths and weaknesses. It is not helpful to focus only on weaknesses. We should try and focus on what we do well, or even what we can do to improve our weaknesses. **In the race:** We could think, "I'm not so good at starting races, but I'm fantastic at turning corners and I always come down the home straight like a bullet! I'm in with a chance!"

We should celebrate our wins, and the wins of those around us. Being proud of our achievements, whatever the circumstances, will make us feel good. **In the race:** A win is a win is a win. If we won that race, we should celebrate and be proud. "I won the race, and it's great!"

Nobody can read minds. It's unhelpful to make assumptions about what others think of us. There is too much information we don't have to draw any real conclusions. The only way to know how someone feels is to communicate! **In the race:** We won't run well if we spend the whole time worrying about what people think of us. It's much more helpful to just focus on the task at hand!

We need to maintain perspective. If something goes wrong we can try to see the bigger picture. There are many other possibilities ahead of us, many more races. **In the race:** We can try to step back, and understand tripping in a training session as just one moment in our preparation for the race.

Feelings have different sources. Sometimes we feel negative because we are tired, grumpy, or have PMT. Emotions aren't facts, and we can change them. **In the race:** We can acknowledge our pessimistic feelings, and see them as something we can change by focussing on positive thoughts e.g. "I have worked hard and will do my best."

There is rarely one 'right' way of doing things. Everyone has their own approach. It's okay for us to find our own way, and to make sure that it's achievable for us. **In the race:** It's much more helpful to set a realistic goal, for example training twice a week. It's also important that we understand that sometimes we will do it, and that that's okay.

It is not helpful to label ourselves or put ourselves down. We are all 100% worthwhile, just because we are human beings. And we're all learning - we can't learn without making mistakes! **In the race:** We can tell ourselves, "I'm not a loser, and I'm looking forward to the next race."

There are some things we can influence, and many more things we cannot. It is very helpful to work out which is which. **In the race:** We can focus on those things we can influence, such as our training, what we eat before the race etc. The things we can't influence, like the weather, we can simply accept.

## For more information

Ring the Power On Team at Women's Health West on 9689 9588 or look us up online at [www.whwest.org.au](http://www.whwest.org.au)

