



Healthy Living

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Think positively and health will reap benefits



By Phyllis Rose

Want to improve your health? Then improve your thinking. Replacing negative self-talk with positive may improve your physical well-being.

Stress and negative thoughts affect everything from your immune system to the quality of your sleep to whether you suffer from panic attacks and even heart attacks, said psychologist David Wagner, owner of Desert Streams Christian Counseling, 2019 Rambling Road.

"It's a cumulative effect," he said. "If you have a bad

day, that doesn't necessarily mean that you've affected your health all that much, but when you've had a bad month or year or 10 years, then that cumulative negative effect can almost overwhelm the body to some degree and cause all sorts of physical difficulties."

Negative thinking can also lead to unhealthy behaviors such as overeating, drinking and drug abuse, all of which serve as temporary escapes, he said.

"Temporarily they work, which is why they are so insidious," he said. "If you don't care about yourself, if you don't love yourself, then (you think), 'If I put on 50 pounds, if I drink until I'm passed out every night, if I use drugs to escape every night, what's the difference, because I'm not worth anything anyway.' Negative thoughts can lead to all sorts of unhealthy behaviors and dangerous behaviors."

But once people begin to



sam zomer/correspondent

David Wagner, of Desert Streams Christian Counseling, supportively listens to a patient relate experiences related to improved positive thinking.

love themselves, they can more easily give up overeating, drinking, taking drugs or other dangerous behaviors, said Wagner. The change in behavior that comes with positive thinking can be tremendous.

"Once the light bulb

goes on or once they have a transformation in how they look at themselves – and for us spiritually, how God looks at them – everything begins to change," he said. "They look different. They act differently. They walk differently. Everything about their whole demeanor

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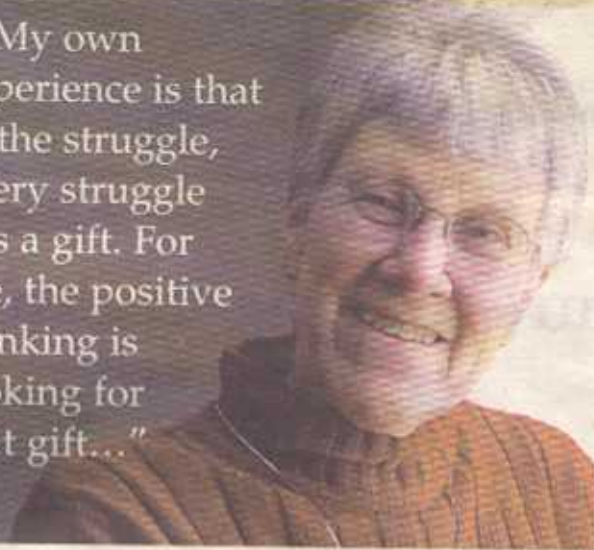
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Learning for Life

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sam zomer/correspondent

Sister Gertrude Maurer, spiritual director at Transformation Spirituality Center, believes in gratitude and the difference it can make in one's life.

changes, because they're viewing themselves and their lives differently."

To tap into the power of positive thinking, you need to catch yourself when the negative tapes begin to play in your head, said Wagner. Then, replace them with positive thoughts, reinforcing the idea that you have value. Emphasize those areas where you think you are doing a good job. Maybe you're a good student, a good mother or a good father, for example.

"Any of those places in your life that you believe you are doing a pretty good job, hang your hat on that and begin to build a different way of looking at yourself by replacing the negatives and the lies with the positives and the truth," he said. "It's a daily and, for some, a minute by minute battle, because some are incredibly hard on themselves every single day and practically every single hour."

Another way of dealing with the negative experiences you're going through is to look for the gift that's in the struggle, said Sister Gertrude Maurer, spiritual director at Transformation Spirituality Center, 3427 Gull Road.

"Where I come from is gratitude and the difference that makes," said Maurer. "If we are happy people, then of course your health tends to be better. My own experience is that in the struggle, every struggle has a gift. For me, the positive thinking is looking for that gift."

In the midst of terrible pain – physical or emotional – if you can stay

in touch with the reality that there is something in the situation that will help you grow and mature, then there will be a gift from the experience, she said. For example, a radical life change could lead to a whole new way of looking at life. Or from a painful experience that may have been very isolating, you can emerge with a stronger sense of independence or a stronger awareness of your own strength to handle things, so that the isolation strengthens instead of debilitates you.

People who can embrace the gift in a painful experience tend to be healthier physically, said Maurer. "But even more so, they are healthier emotionally and spiritually," she said. "There's enough evidence out there, and enough research being done on the brain and the kinds of chemicals that are released by that ability, to have another perspective that it is positive for them, that it does help them be healthier in mind, body and spirit."

Techniques that can help instill a new perspective involve prayer, reading works from whatever religious tradition you value,

and helping others, which shifts your focus from yourself, she said.

"If you can also focus on something that you can do for another that's positive, it helps to diffuse some of that energy and works to allow, then, another perspective to come in," said Maurer. "It's not just me, me, me. It evokes that natural tendency within us to want to reach out to others and to not get caught in that 'It's all about me' (attitude)."

A professional can also help you change negative thoughts into positive ones.

"Most counselors will attempt to help you understand yourself, understand where you came from and where you can go, and try and be one of those positive influences in a person's life," said Wagner. "No counselor ever makes any change in a person. We help the person make the change in themselves. We can help the person in a number of different ways (to) look at themselves differently so they can heal and find some restoration in themselves."

So empower yourself by tapping into the power of positive thinking for a healthier new you.