

# Staying Positive May Help You Get Healthier

Putting an optimistic spin on negative thoughts may make a big difference.

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## Many of us have a tendency to think about healthy

behaviors in black-and-white extremes: chocolate is bad, carrots are good; missing a few daily walks means you've fallen off the wagon; a high blood pressure reading means your health is spiraling out of control. This distorted thinking pattern may harm your efforts to improve your health because small setbacks may cause you to feel defeated and ready to give up. Here are tips for keeping a positive long-view perspective.

### Catch yourself using words like “always,” “must” or “never.”

Imperatives like this set impossible standards—and set you up for failure when you (inevitably) don't live up to them. You can't “always” avoid salty foods or take your walk at the *exact* time you've scheduled it in. Hearing yourself say words like “must” or “never” and recognizing this sort of “all-or-nothing thinking” is a huge first step to changing it.



Photo Credit: Blaine Moats

Photo is of a model not an actual patient.

**Replace rigid words with more flexible ones.** Try “sometimes,” “most of the time,” “as often as I can” or “during the week.” The more you practice, the easier it will be.

**Rewrite your “scripts.”** If you find yourself vowing things like “I will never eat pizza again,” soften the script. Try something like this: “I'll try to choose alternatives to pizza most of the time, but when I do have some, I'll just have one slice and enjoy it.”

**Don't beat yourself up.** Beyond “all-or-nothing” thinking, your internal thoughts about yourself can have a huge impact on your ability to change your habits. If you treat yourself like a failure, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you work to replace negative thoughts with positive “counter-thoughts,” you can turn a minor setback into a small victory. For example, instead of getting down over a diet slip-up, focus on how good you feel after a healthy meal and an after-dinner walk.

**Practice your “positive spinning.”** One strategy for keeping an optimistic outlook is anticipating potential problems and thinking ahead about how you might reframe the negative thoughts that automatically bubble up. Right now, think of three bumps in the road that may get in the way of improving your health. Now, transform the negative attitudes you anticipate into positive, can-do statements. For each obstacle you anticipate, write down: 1) the potential problem, 2) the typical negative thought and 3) a positive counter-thought.