4 Ways to Be More Optimistic

By K. Aleisha Fetters
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The grass really is greener in some places: The residents of Hoboken, NJ, are the most optimistic people in the country, according to a new survey from the dating site Chemistry.com. Here’s the full list of the top 10, compiled from a poll of more than 10 million singles nationwide:

1. Hoboken, NJ
2. Redondo Beach, CA
3. Santa Fe, NM
4. Naperville, IL
5. Boca Raton, FL
6. Newport Beach, CA
7. Mountain View, CA
8. Waukesha, WI
9. Scottsdale, AZ
10. Irvine, CA

This is great news for anyone who lives in those zip codes: “People who tend to have a bright outlook on the future have far-reaching mental and physical benefits,” says positive psychology researcher Fred B. Bryant, PhD, professor of psychology at Loyola University Chicago. Research for Yale University has found that an optimistic perspective tacks an average of 7.6 years onto our lives—that’s more bonus time than low blood pressure, low cholesterol, a healthy weight, or regular exercise will score you. Optimists also have a lower risk of heart attack and greater resistance to the common cold, Bryant says. Not to mention they lead happier lives with healthier relationships.

Now here’s the good news for everyone else: you can train yourself to make lemonade out of lemons. “If you work at it, you can change the way you think,” Bryant says.

Here, four ways to boost your optimism—and along with it, your health:

Explain Things Differently
You will go through a torturous breakup or a grad school rejection. Bad things are a part of life—but here’s a trick to make sure they don’t totally sap your positivity: Write down what happened, along with how you interpret both the cause of the event and its impact on your life. Then, make a conscious effort to explain the situation differently, focusing on non-personal, changeable causes and outcomes. For instance, if you were fired, don’t tell yourself that you’re talentless and will go broke. Instead, tell yourself that this particular job wasn’t the perfect fit for
you—and that this is an opportunity to find a better one. This mindset will bring you more success, Bryant says.

Call Yourself Out When You’re Negative
When you start getting down on yourself, snapping out of it is easier said than done. Giving yourself a physical reminder every time you’re a Debby downer can be a helpful tool for changing your attitude, Bryant says. Try this: Wear a hair band around your wrist, and every time you start thinking self-destructive, pessimistic thoughts, pull it to literally give yourself a slap on the wrist. That way you’ll remember to ease up on yourself before you’ve sunken into too deep of a funk.

Eat Your Antioxidants
Optimists eat more carotenoids—the antioxidants that produce bright pigments in fruits and veggies—than people with a pessimistic outlook, according to a new study in Psychosomatic Medicine. Researchers say that healthy eating may allow them to more effectively deal with stress and manage challenges. Pack your plate with colorful produce.

Focus on What’s in Your Control
“Some people are so afraid of failing that they protect themselves by adopting a negative view that bad things will happen, whatever they do,” Bryant says. Instead of dwelling on all of the horrible things that might potentially happen to you, focus on what’s in your control and how you can direct your outcomes, Bryant says. Establish small, achievable goals that can help you get where you ultimately want to be, and practice focusing on those—instead of what could possibly go wrong.