

# Mental Outlook

## Self Scoring Assessment

**Instructions:** For each question, mark one response that most typically describes how you think or feel.

	Fully agree	Partially agree	Don't agree
1. I expect much from life.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
2. I do not look forward to what lies ahead of me in the years to come.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
3. My days seem to pass slowly.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
4. My life is full of plans.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
5. I expect things to work out well for me.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
6. I blame myself if things go wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
7. I believe that something positive can be found in most negative situations.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
8. I see change in life as difficult and annoying.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
9. I see change as opportunity for growth and improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0

**Scoring.** Add the small number on the right side of each answer you marked. The total number is your Optimism Score. Mark your score with an 'X' on the scale below.

### Optimism scale



### Interpreting Your Score

- Scores of 0 - 9      Indicates low optimism – increases risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Scores of 10 - 16      Indicates moderate optimism – moderate increased risk.
- Scores of 17 - 18      Indicates optimism – protects against risk of cardiovascular disease.

Research shows that optimistic people have less cardiovascular disease and cope better with life than those whose outlook is predominantly pessimistic. A positive, hopeful outlook promotes both physical and emotional health, and prolongs life! See the reverse side for additional information on optimism and health.

*Based on the following research: Giltay EJ, et al. Archives of Internal Medicine. February 27, 2006.*

**For more information on improving your mental outlook, please see the following page.**

# Optimism promotes **HEALTH**

*If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it.*

William Author Ward

## Two Ways of Approaching Life

### One sees life as full of opportunities.

- You are full of hope and expect good things to happen.
- If something does go wrong, it's not your fault, and it will get better.
- Problems are challenges to work on until they get solved.
- Defeat is just a temporary setback.

This outlook on life is called **optimism**. Optimists tend to be happier, cope better with life, do better in work and sports, are less depressed, generally have better health, age well, and live longer.

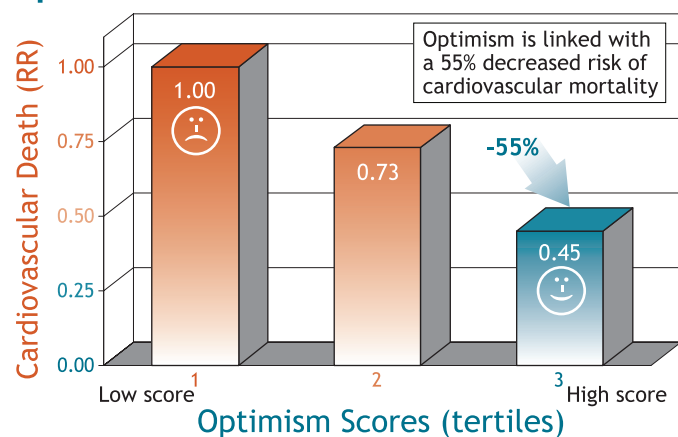
### Others see life through a different set of glasses.

- Life is full of problems and they expect bad things to happen.
- Defeat or failure is a major setback.
- They tend to give up and feel helpless rather than continuing to solve problems.

This is a **pessimistic** outlook. It undermines everything a person does and erodes self-confidence, happiness, hope, and even physical health. A pessimistic outlook seems to be self-fulfilling. What can go wrong, will and it is their fault and it will likely get worse.

Recent research shows that pessimists are significantly more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke (see chart below) than optimists.<sup>3</sup> Other research shows that optimists have an increased life expectancy. How we see and react to life has consequences.

## Optimism and Cardiovascular Disease



n = 545 men, 15-year study

Source: Archives of Internal Medicine Feb. 27, 2006.

## How to Become More Optimistic

You can always change the way you think but it requires effort and a willingness to change. Use these techniques to become more optimistic in your thinking.

- 1. Identify your negative thoughts and beliefs.** This could include things like arguments with a friend or being disciplined by a supervisor. Talk to yourself about the situations and challenges in your life. Look for ways to overcome setbacks, solve problems, and carry on.
- 2. Write down your negative feelings and how you have responded to negative situations.** Then look for ways to deal with those feelings and responses. What can you do that would lead to a solution? Make a list of possibilities.
- 3. Tell yourself that setbacks are temporary.** You can overcome your 'failures.' Then, set out to do just that. Will it always work? Probably not, but if you never try you can't succeed – ever.
- 4. Be aware of exaggerated thinking.** When you think of things that include 'always' and 'never' as negative statements, stop and look at what you're saying and rephrase it in a way that acknowledges the possibility of change or improvement. Is it realistic to believe that something will always be impossible?
- 5. Be hopeful.** Life isn't always fair but you can control and influence many parts of your life.
- 6. Be realistic.** Bad things can happen to good people, but you're not necessarily the cause. You won't always be successful, but keep trying. You can help in creating positive outcomes.
- 7. Don't blame yourself for everything.** It's not productive.
- 8. Get regular, physical activity.** It improves mood and helps build courage and self-confidence.
- 9. Take control of your life.** You are not helpless. You can take actions to make life better. Get help from knowledgeable people and counselors that can help you achieve your life goals.

1. Seligman MEP. *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Life*. Picket Books: New York, NY. 1990, 1998.

2. *Psychosomatic Medicine*. November/December 2001.

3. Giltay EJ et al. *Archive of Internal Medicine*. February 27, 2006.