



# LIFE

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## Looking on the Bright Side

By Dr. Erica Miller

**L**iving long and living well require individuals to adopt a positive attitude and hopeful outlook for the future. And that means facing a certain harsh reality: Even the healthiest person can drop dead from an undetected, asymptomatic brain aneurysm or get broadsided by a drunk driver. Life is full of risks and uncertainties, even for the ones determined to live the longest. The chronologically gifted, those who age well, don't fear death because they know that life is not infinite. The past is gone, and the future may never be, so the goal is to live in the moment — as if you'll live forever.

### Changing Perspectives

The chronologically gifted have what psychologists call a “growth mindset.” This is an attitude of continual self-improvement, always preparing today for a better tomorrow.

If people simply set their minds to it, they can discover creative ways to live their lives without limitations. For example, consider the following opportunities to see things differently.

- Changing bodies means a loss of beauty and attractiveness. Another perspective is: Adopt the belief that attractiveness, at any age, goes far beyond outward appearances.
- Aches and pains can make life difficult. Another perspective is: Become realistic about life's challenges without becoming pessimistic about them.
- For some people, getting older means realizing how many opportunities they've squandered over the years. Another perspective is: There's no time like the present to seize the day and make new memories.

This is the way longevity all-stars think about life — as something for which they can be authentically grateful, treasuring past memories while looking forward to making new ones, savoring the pleasures of today.

There's no question about it: Positive thinking patterns can form the basis for a cultivated discipline of optimism that, quite literally, can change the world.

### Time to Get to Work!

No one goes from being a pessimist to being an optimist overnight; thought patterns are ingrained habits tied to our environment and personality.

But the good news is that even the most deep-rooted habits can be changed. That means if someone is unhappy with the routine thoughts that fill their head today, they can bend their will toward becoming the kind of thinker who consistently opts for hope, where others settle for despair.

In time, they'll find that their routine thoughts — their equilibrium state — will have changed to reflect a more optimistic outlook on life, and they'll have more resources for dealing with adversity.

Here are a few ideas for increasing optimism.

**1. Keep a thought journal.** Start thinking critically about your thought patterns. Some people may be more optimistic than they realize, in which case a thought journal may help replicate more positive thoughts throughout the coming weeks.

But others might discover they're far more pessimistic than they imagined. In that case, a thought journal can be documentary evidence to motivate individuals to look for new ways to frame the way they deal with their world.

**2. Inventory the chronic stressors in your life.** Make three columns to help keep your list organized: places where you feel tense, things that stress you out, and people who create tension in your life.

Places can be general, like crowds, or specific, like movie theaters. The “things” column could include tangible objects you see and touch as well as intangibles, like ideas, categories, and discussion topics.

The people column is often the most difficult to name. You know deep inside the damage some can cause but are reluctant to list and release them. This realization is itself a source of stress.

When people have relationships with those who are toxic to their goals of living longer, better lives, it is important to move toward ridding themselves of those negative individuals.

**3. Smile more often.** It has become a cliché at this point, but it's actually true. Laughter is powerful medicine for the body as well as the soul. Just the physical act of smiling makes our neurons fire and can literally make us feel better.

## The Bottom Line

People who live longer, more fulfilling lives know that pursuing personal goals regularly is a huge secret to longevity. It removes chronological age from your mind and calls attention to the better person you're becoming.

And that helps keep your thoughts optimistically focused toward realizing your inner potential — something that comes with age the longer you live.

It's not difficult to work out the profound behavioral ramifications of learned helplessness and explanatory style. Optimists are the ones who can “take the hit” of adversity without missing a beat, while pessimists will be defeated every time.

For pessimists, adversity is the norm, and even the biggest victories are just exceptions to the rule. For optimists, victory is normal, and adversity is just a challenge to overcome.

What kind of person do you want to be? Decide now, because your life depends on it.

### About Erica Miller

*Dr. Erica Miller holds her Ph.D. in clinical psychology and has written extensively on topics of positive psychology, longevity, overcoming challenges, and living life to its fullest. Her most recent book, *Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto*, made her an international bestselling author. For more information, visit [www.drericamiller.com](http://www.drericamiller.com).*

