

## **Optimism: Preventative Medicine and Vitamins for Wellbeing**

Families and work teams who develop and maintain general optimism will weather most of life's challenges even under adverse conditions. In 2010, researchers examined the results of 83 scientific studies measuring the impact of optimism on physical health. The studies looked at *if* and *how* optimism and pessimism impacted overall longevity. The study topics varied from survival from a disease, heart health, immunity, cancer outcomes, pregnancy outcomes, pain tolerance, or to other health concerns. What the 83 independent studies revealed was consistently astounding. Those who had a more optimistic outlook performed better and had a better outcome than those who tended toward pessimism.

Another notable case study was conducted by Dr. Dennis Charney, Dean of Mount Sinai School of Medicine, in which he studied 750 Vietnam War veterans. These veterans were prisoners of war who were abused and tortured. Dr. Charney had all 750 veterans take a test and noticed one thing in common. Those who did not develop post-traumatic stress disorder or suffer from depression or depression-related symptoms had optimism at the top of the list of ten things that set them apart from the other veterans. Next to optimism was selflessness, humor, a belief in a higher power, and that there was meaning behind their lives.

During drastic life changes such as losing a job or loved one, caring for someone with a chronic illness, etc., it is often hard to

view things in an optimistic light. Pessimism results in focusing the blame inward and seeing no way out which compounds the stressful effects. Optimists, on the other hand, focus on the good and what they can change in the situation rather than assume the solution is out of their control. The key to optimism and managing stress is believing one can make a change or find solutions and then working little by little to implement the change or achieve the solutions. Let's take a look at what some of the leaders in positive psychology say for increasing optimism in our lives.

### **Ten Tips to Increase Optimism**

- 1. Notice and change negative self-talk** (get rid of *can't*)
- 2. Use positive thinking and positive self-talk**
- 3. Reframe how you define events.** (negative to positive)
- 4. Focus on the here and now.** Avoid obsessing over the past and worrying about the future. Ask what can I do now?
- 5. Be realistic and expect ups and downs.**
- 6. Focus on what you can control; let go of what you can't.**
- 7. Set and pursue goals.**
- 8. Be persistent.** Set positive expectations; don't give up.
- 9. Surround yourself with positive people.**
- 10. Focus on the positive.** Keep a daily journal of positive things that happen -this will change your thinking over time.