



POSITIVE THINKING PATTERNS

Thought patterns are the habitual (repetitive) way that we perceive, think, and feel about different aspects and situations in our lives. Thought patterns are rooted in the subconscious mind and blossom in our conscious mind. Because they are rooted in the subconscious mind, they act like an invisible force directing our actions, reactions, perception, feelings, and how we live each day of our lives. Because thought patterns blossom in the conscious mind, individuals have the ability to recognize thought patterns and consciously nurture healthy (positive) thought patterns or redirect unhealthy (negative) thought patterns.

UNDERSTANDING THOUGHT PATTERNS

Thought patterns are established along neuropathways in our subconscious mind. The first time we consciously process a specific experience in our life, a thin neuropathway is created and a thought pattern is born. Each time we are exposed to that specific experience, we will have the tendency to process that experience according to the initial thought pattern that was established. Each time that thought pattern is repeated, its specific neuropathway expands and thickens. The thicker the neuropathway becomes, the more powerfully it influences the way we perceive, think, and feel about different aspects and situations in our lives. For example, if we have a negative thought pattern about ourselves, we tend to act in a way that confirms those negative thoughts.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CONSCIOUS THOUGHTS – STEP ONE

Many people assume they have no control over their thoughts. I can't tell you how many times I have had people tell me, "I can't help the way I think." WRONG! Everybody has the ability to modify conscious thoughts and affect subconscious thought patterns, yet very few individuals take advantage of this ability to take control of their thoughts.

If you are a person who has believed, "I can't help the way I think," you might be wondering how to start taking control of your thoughts and thought patterns. The first step is that you must become aware of how you perceive, think and feel about different aspects and situations in your life. In other words, you need to become aware of your thought patterns. The following awareness exercises will help get you started.

AWARENESS EXERCISE: POSITIVE THINKING

Become more aware of how positive you are by answering these 15 questions honestly as possible. Use this scoring system when answering the questions:

5 if your answer is Always or Almost Always **4** if it is Usually
3 for Sometimes **2** for Rarely **1** for Never

- _____ When the unexpected forces you to change your plans, are you quick to spot a hidden advantage in this new situation?
- _____ When you catch a stranger staring at you, do you conclude it's because he or she finds you attractive?
- _____ Do you like most people you meet?
- _____ When you think about next year, do you tend to think you will be better off then, than you are now?
- _____ Do you often stop to admire things of beauty?
- _____ When someone finds fault with you or something you've done, can you tell the difference between useful criticism and "sour grapes", which is better off being ignored?
- _____ Do you praise your spouse / best friend / lover more often than you criticize him or her?
- _____ Do you believe the human race will survive into the 22nd century?
- _____ Are you surprised when a friend lets you down?
- _____ Do you think of yourself as happy?
- _____ If a policeman stopped you for speeding and you were quite certain you weren't speeding, would you firmly argue your case and even take it to court to prove you were right?
- _____ Do you feel comfortable making yourself the butt of your own jokes?
- _____ Do you believe that, overall, your state of mind has had a positive effect on your state of health?
- _____ If you made a list of your 10 favorite people, would you be on it?
- _____ When you think back over the past few months, do you tend to remember your little successes before your setbacks and failures?
- _____ **TOTAL SCORE**

Compare your TOTAL SCORE with this scoring chart:

Total Score	Interpretation
65+	Consider yourself a super star – your optimism is like a super power that supports optimum health.
60 - 64	You are a genuine positive thinker – your health is positively affected by your optimism.
55 - 59	You are a positive thinker sometimes. Small health benefits reaped during times of optimism.
50 – 54	Your positive thoughts are cancelled out by your negative thoughts and visa versa. No health benefits from your thought patterns.
< 50	Negative thought patterns predominate and may be damaging your health.

AWARENESS EXERCISE: RESPONSE TO SITUATIONS

Become more aware of how you respond to different situations throughout your day. **First**, choose 3 different situations that either had a positive or negative effect on you. It could be an event that took place, an interaction with another person, news that about something. **Next**, describe each situation. **Lastly**, answer these questions about each situation:

1. Why do you think the situation had a positive or negative effect on you?
2. What kind of emotions did you experience during and after the situation?
3. Do you think the emotions were based on facts of the situation or on perceptions and beliefs in your mind?

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CONSCIOUS THOUGHTS – STEP TWO

After you have spent some time becoming more aware of your thought patterns, identify if your thought patterns are positive or negative. This ID EXERCISE will help you take a deeper dive into your thought patterns.

ID EXERCISE: THOUGHT PATTERNS

Below, you will find two list of thought patterns. As you read each thought pattern, positive and negative, ask yourself, “Does this sound like me?” Whenever you answer yes, give an example of when this thought pattern was utilized. There is space provided below each thought pattern for you to write your examples.

POSTITIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS	
1	Believe that good prevails over evil
2	Cheerful, hopeful expectations
3	Look at the bright side of situations

4	Seek and expect good outcomes
5	Focus on the positive in self, others, situations, and life
6	Confront and silence their internal critic
7	Positive self-talk
8	Vocabulary full of positive, empowering words and word-phrases
9	Have learned to laugh at themselves and don't take themselves too seriously.
10	Take time to reflect on good things in their lives and feel grateful
11	Don't feel sorry for themselves
12	View problems as temporary challenges and seek solutions.
13	Don't beat themselves up over mistakes. Instead, energy is spent solving problems, fixing mistakes, forming plans to prevent mistakes from happening again, and reflecting on what has been learned.
14	Surround themselves with loving, caring, sensitive, happy people
15	Focus on the present! You miss out on present experiences when you are spending time worrying about the past or the future. Learn from yesterday, plan wisely for tomorrow, and enjoy today!
16	Seek positive environments with uplifting stimulation

Positive thought patterns build you up, empower you, make you feel happy and self-confident.

NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS	
1	Always/never thinking (exaggerating) – everybody, nobody, etc.
2	Negative focus– see only the bad in a situation and block out or ignore the good
3	Fortune telling – predicting the worse possible outcome
4	Mind reading – believing you know what others are thinking even though they have not told you.
5	Thinking with negative feelings – believing negative feelings without questioning their validity
6	Guilt beating – I should have, I must, I have to...
7	Labeling – attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else
8	Personalizing – you become personally responsible for others foul moods
9	Blaming – you blame someone else for your problems and take on the role of a helpless victim
10	Black/White thinking – it's either all good or all bad, no in between

Negative thought patterns can be incredibly harmful. That's why it is vital to learn to recognize negative thought patterns and exchange them for positive ones. It takes commitment, focus, time and effort to exchange negative thought patterns for positive patterns. This sounds like work and it is, but it's worth it in the end.

CHANGING THOUGHT PATTERNS – STEP THREE

Now that you have gained a greater awareness of your thought patterns and identified which of your thought patterns are positive and negative, it is time to explore approaches to changing negative thought patterns into more positive patterns.

Gratitude is one of the most important thoughts/emotions you can have for your well-being. Research has shown that practicing gratitude leads to increased happiness, reduced stress, and better immune system function. Practicing gratitude can transform the emotional center of the brain from a negative state (promoting a negative perceptions, emotions, and actions) to a positive state (promoting a positive perception, emotions, and actions). This literally helps prime the brain for positive thinking patterns.

Here is one way you can cultivate gratefulness in your life. Write down three (or more) things you are grateful for every day. You can set reminders in your calendar or on your phone to do this daily activity. As time progresses, challenge yourself to write longer gratitude lists. The benefits will start to manifest over time!

Thinking about the little things that make your life enjoyable will help shift your focus from negative thoughts to positive. Taking time out each day to be grateful can help improve your mood and outlook on life – it's definitely worth giving it a try!

Mindset can have a big influence on perception and therefore thought patterns. There are 2 types of mind sets - the growth mindset and the fixed mindset.

People with a growth mindset are interested in setting learning goals which means they are more interested in gaining competence and growing, than they are about passing or failing. Rather than focusing on how they feel, they focus on what they can learn from the experience which will help them do better next time. They are willing to try new approaches in order to improve. They see problems as opportunities to try new strategies. They give more weight to effort determining success than the final outcome. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. People with a growth mindset don't give up easy. They view change as a journey and set out with the intention of thoroughly enjoying the journey.

People with a fixed mindset set performance goals and focus on the end result. It is about passing or failing. Change is about the destination. When people with a fixed mindset fail to achieve their performance goals, they feel helpless and hopeless. It is easy for them to get depressed, lose self-esteem and run out of steam (motivation). When faced with a problem, they typically keep repeating the same behavior. Rather than try something new, they will give up completely.

As you read these two descriptions, could you relate to any of the characteristics of either mindset? Grab a highlighter and read back through these two descriptions. Highlight every characteristic that describes you. Which mindset do you have? If you find that you mostly have a fixed mind set, can you think of anything you can do to shift to a growth mindset?

Changing our thought patterns takes a commitment to staying aware of conscious thoughts, how those thoughts affect your emotional wellbeing, and purposefully taking actions to exchange negative unhealthy thought patterns for positive health supporting patterns. This requires us to talk to ourselves differently. It might involve positive and affirming self-talk (See the handout titled *Become Aware of Self Talk*). It might require challenging negative thought patterns head-on (See the handout titled *Derail Negative Thinking*). It might include practicing positive affirmations (See the handout titled *Positive Affirmations*).

Everyone has control to choose their conscious thoughts, yet very few individuals take advantage of this control. The conscious mind, like the physical body, requires constant conditioning to stay fit. It is well worth the effort it takes to exchange negative unhealthy thought patterns for positive health supporting patterns. The benefits are tremendous and far reaching. Optimism is one of the most powerful tools you have to promote and support optimum health. Harnessing optimism creates a virtuous cycle that leads to continuous growth and progress.