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## Rebalancing Good and Bad Perspectives

### Overview

This wiki will provide information and resources for the idea that good and bad perspectives can be rebalanced. We will explore a number of different theories, studies and explore techniques that have been proposed to be effective in addressing positive and negative emotions.

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### Optimism

by **Maria Johnson**

o What is optimism?

o Living in Scotland and leaving for uni without an umbrella?

o Describing the glass as being half-full?

Optimism has been defined by many different people over the years, from; Voltaire to Oscar Wilde, however, a general definition by Lionel Tiger (1979) states that optimism is:

*“ a mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future—on which the evaluator regards as socially desirable, to his [or her] advantage, or for his [or her] pleasure ” .*

In this definition, optimism is regarded as an individual difference: one person's idea of optimism will differ from another's (for more information please see the Individual Differences section below). Some would consider optimism as a cognitive characteristic; however it is important not to overlook the important role that emotion plays in having an optimistic outcome (explored further in the role of optimism in regards to mental and physical health section).

Learned optimism is a term that was first used by Seligman (1991). In this paper, Seligman stated that a person can learn to talk themselves through adverse situations and proposed an ABCDE model in order to help them do this:

1. Adversity: The dispute or incident occurs.
2. Beliefs: This may lead you to react in a negative manner, and start having negative thoughts.
3. Consequences: You may decide to act on these negative feelings by, for example, confronting someone who has caused you to feel this way.
4. Disputation: You start to think of counter-evidence as to why the incident has occurred.
5. Energisation: Successful disputation of negative ideas can lead to the creation of a more positive way of thinking.

For example, you may be queuing for a drink at a busy bar and someone cuts in front of you and gets served first (*Adversity*). You might start to think: “I can't believe that person's just skipped me! How selfish!” (*Beliefs*) This may lead to you becoming so annoyed that you confront them (*Consequences*). However, you may start to see that you are overreacting to the situation, and might start to think of reasons as to why the person skipped the queue: they may have spilled a drink and need a cloth to mop it up or are in need of some water (*Disputation*). By disputing these negative ideas, a more positive atmosphere is created where any negative thoughts have been replaced with more positive ones, such as : “I'm not in any rush and I'll be served next, anyways” (*Energisation*).

### **Learned Helplessness:**

Seligman (1991) also devised the term “Learned helplessness” after witnessing the reaction of dogs who were exposed to an aversive stimuli and were unable to escape. In one experiment, dogs were placed in a box and received electric shocks from the floor. In order to escape these shocks, the dogs had to climb over a wall into the other side of the box. Seligman et al observed that when an animal is subjected to adverse conditions that it cannot escape from, it will eventually stop trying to escape and appears to “accept defeat”. Even if the dog is then given an opportunity to escape the shocks, it will behave as if it is helpless to change the situation.

Learned helplessness can also occur in humans: if Bob receives a D3 for his stats exam, he may start to believe that he cannot understand stats and will always fail in his attempts. This learned behaviour has also been evident in psychological disorders, such as; depression and anxiety disorder.

### **Catastrophising:**

Catastrophising occurs when we believe that an event will be far worse than it actually is. There are two types of catastrophising, firstly: making a catastrophe of a particular situation. This may occur at exam time when we are: anxious, believe that we have not studied enough and will, therefore, fail the exam. In actual fact there are steps that can be taken to prevent the situation from occurring, such as following a study timetable. The second type of catastrophising occurs when thinking about the future and start thinking about things that could go wrong, for example: if I fail this exam I will not get a good job and will not be able to live the life I imagined.

These two types of catastrophising can have a greatly negative impact on the individual's life: if you believe in the negative event occurring, it can facilitate a self-fulfilling prophecy where failure is likely, and create an overall feeling of hopelessness.

**Positives:** Learned optimism could be applied to cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques to help treat depression. Beck stated in his “Cognitive Triad” model that depression is caused when a person has a negative view of; themselves, the world and the future. By employing Seligman's ABCDE model, the depressed individual could learn to tackle these negative thoughts and replace them with more positive ones. It would also help in situations where someone is catastrophising or has admitted defeat (as in learned helplessness) by helping to replace these thoughts with more optimistic ones.

**Problems:** Is it possible to be a little optimist, but a big pessimist? Some may find it easier to be optimistic about mundane (or “little”) things, such as; being confident of still catching the early bus when you're running late. As opposed to showing optimism about “big” or serious matters, such as; Scotland thriving as an independent country. Although people would tend to define themselves as either an optimist or pessimist; it may be possible to be both!

Always look on the bright side of life...

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## **Optimism, Pessimism and Well Being**

**by Claire Johnstone**

Over the years, optimism has been linked with a wide range of physical and psychological benefits resulting in this personality trait being described as protective (Rasmussen, Scheier and Greenhouse, 2009). Since optimism and pessimism exist independently, i.e. the absence of optimism does not necessarily mean the presence of pessimism or vice versa, these psychological states and their impact on health will be investigated separately.

### **Physical Health**

Some studies have shown that optimists are physically healthier than those who are pessimistic. In 2009, using an all women sample it was found that optimism was linked with a reduced risk of coronary heart disease as well as overall mortality (Tindle, Chang, Kuller, Manson, Robinson, Milagros, Siegle and Matthews, 2009). One particular cause of coronary heart disease is atherosclerosis which Matthews, Sutton-Tyrrell and Kuller (2004) found to be less likely to occur in those who were optimistic whilst being pessimistic increased chances of development. Furthermore, it has been found that those individuals undergoing coronary artery bypass are less likely to be re-hospitalised after their surgery if they are optimistic compared with those who have a less positive attitude to life. Optimism has even been demonstrated to predict longer life in a Dutch study where 900 elderly people were less likely to die over the next ten years of the study compared with those who were less optimistic (Giltay, Geleijnse, Zitman, Hoekstra and Schouten, 2004).

### **Mental Health**

Optimism has also been linked with psychological benefits such as lower distress levels. An early study from 1987 investigated optimism and psychological well-being in pregnant women by asking them to complete a depression measure before giving birth and then again after giving birth. They found that those mothers who were more optimistic before birth had lower depression levels after giving birth than those who were more pessimistic (Carver and Gaines, 1987). Later, optimism was again linked with lower distress in breast cancer patients with those having a positive outlook on life being less emotionally unstable at their diagnosis and before and after their surgery (Carver, Pozo, Harris, Noriega, Scheier and Robinson, 1993). Furthermore, moving away from a medical setting, Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) reported optimism predicted less distress than pessimism in students during their first year of college.

An explanation for the protective aspect of optimism against distress could be the differences in the way in which optimists and pessimists cope with adverse situations. Studies have found that optimists tend to approach problems and try to find ways in which to solve them whereas pessimists are more likely to avoid problems and

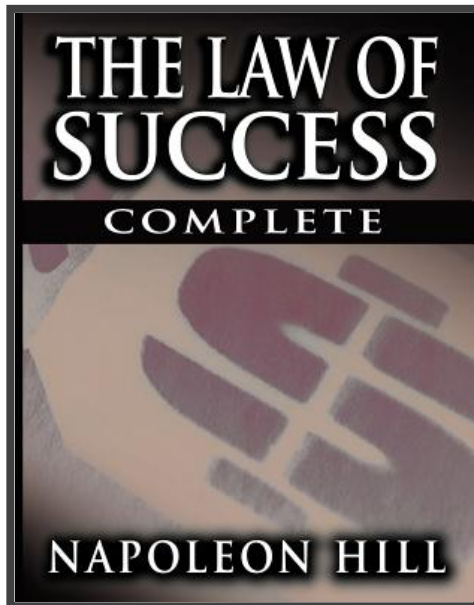
tend to overthink the negative aspects of the problem making them appear more severe than they perhaps are in reality. Therefore it could be argued that this method of coping leads to problems building up resulting in the individual becoming more and more psychologically distressed (Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom, 2010).

From available literature, it could be argued that being an optimistic person will lead to a happier and healthier life than adopting a pessimistic outlook on life.

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### Optimism and Success: The Positive Frame of Mind

By Robert Joyce



*"Optimism isn't a state of mind which you throw judgment to the winds in starry-eyed belief that the future events will take care of themselves. Such an outlook is only for fools. It is, however, a firm belief that you can make things come out right by thinking ahead and deciding on a course of action based on sound judgment."*

#### **Napoleon Hill**

Individual differences in optimism - how positively we view ourselves, others and the world around us - all contribute to our motivation, desire, belief, and ultimately our success. Optimism is strongly bound to selective attention, emotional sensitivity to negative situations, motivation to persevere, and consequently is also a predictor of our social and working success (Hill, 1928; Carnegie, 1936; Shifren, 1996; Solberg-Nes, 2009;)

Shifren (1996) conducted a study amongst sufferers of Parkinson's disease, investigating individual differences in the extent of perceived disease severity as a function of the level of "general" optimism they possessed. It was found that those sufferers who maintained an all-round more positive outlook of themselves, their disease, and their future prognosis showed a heightened ability to cope, displaying less dependability on others in the completion of basic day-to-day activities.

The level to which we maintain that positive frame of mind, even when faced with difficult circumstances, can thus improve our chances of effectively dealing with, rectifying, or even greatly improving a situation – we see this in every day events such as in the world of football when in a run of poor form, or in the world of medicine and psychological research with the common and very real presence of the placebo effect. How someone deals with negative situations can, according to Napoleon Hill (1928) and Dale Carnegie (1936), be the making or breaking of them; a major Law of Success.

One small yet effective way of dealing with “failure” according to Hill (1928), is to refer to it as “temporary defeat”, thus always keeping the optimistic view that a setback can eventually be overcome. Increased optimism can be a strong predictor for future success through consequent increase in motivation and the greater likelihood of fulfilling long-term goals (Hill, 1928; Solberg-Nes, 2009).

These ideas therefore naturally leads us to the relationship between level of optimism and future success (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007) and depends on the positive belief that the goal can be achieved, the willingness to appreciate the importance of persistence (“All of my hard work WILL pay off!”), and the fearlessness of danger/failure (“This is a risk I’m willing to take”) (Hill, 1928).

Further to this, if we adopt an optimistic approach, we are also required to maintain a “realistic” or “wise” level of optimism in order to prevent misguided judgements, with the intelligence to put ideas and goals in their rightful order of realistic achievement (Hill, 1928). In other words, optimism guided in the right direction, can increase personal fulfilment and improve positive perception (Metcalf, 1998). In order to gain greater success and achieve heightened fulfilment in life, we must always maintain a self-awareness of our susceptibility to positivism and the dangers of succumbing to negative, unhelpful thought.

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### The Broaden and Build Theory

**by Claire Jennings**

One theory that has developed within Positive Psychology is Fredrickson’s (1998) Broaden and Build Theory. Fredrickson (1998) identified that there was a lack of positive related emotive psychological theories.

The Broaden and Build Theory is based on the idea that positive events and emotions aid the expansion of individual’s thought-action repertoires; whilst negative events and actions are more likely to result in a narrowing of these thought-action abilities. These thought-action repertoires relate to individuals cognitive patterns that are involved in responding to both positive and negative events (Fredrickson, 2004). Fredrickson identified that four different positive emotions joy; love; contentment and interest can all be explained under The Broaden and Build theory. For instance, love, a positive emotion, can result in people exploring, savouring and playing with one another, expanding on their thought-action repertoires for one another (Fredrickson, 1998). Whilst, joy, when experienced, has been found to be effective in broadening ones intellectual, social and physical skills (Fredrickson, 1998).

Fredrickson (1998; 2001) proposed several features of positive emotions and the effect that they can have on individual abilities and behaviours. Several have been discussed below. Whilst some of these have been studied extensively; others remain limited in regards to research. Proposed papers have been suggested under each topic.

#### 1. Positive emotions broaden the scope of **attention**.

If a person is generally positive, it is not to say that they do not experience negative emotions/events like other people; they are however much better at dealing with negative events for instance not focusing too much on the small stuff and looking at a more general overview of the whole situation. Positive emotions have been found to induce a more global-processing technique.

One study carried out by Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) found that after showing subjects a variety of different movies that prompted different emotions including amusement, contentment, anger and anxiety and a impartial film that evoked no emotion as a control. Following the film, participants had to take part in a global-local visual processing task which participants had to select which figure matched the corresponding standard figure for each trial. Participants were asked what was the strongest emotion they were feeling straight after watching their film and then had to complete a Twenty Statements Test asking them to list twenty things ‘they would like to do’ right now based on the emotion they were feeling after watching their allocated film (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005). This element of the experiment was designed to understand participants thought action repertoires Results found that people who viewed the more positive-emotive films were inclined to show a more global processing ability in regards to the first task of visual processing. The results from the Twenty-Statements Test also found that subjects who observed a positive affect film showed to have an increased number of thought-action responses to things they would like to do after watching their film. The study also interestingly found that between the two positive

states of humour and contentment, amusement was found to have higher broadening activation rates than contentment (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005).

## 2. Positive emotions broaden the scope of **cognition**.

Studies have found that positive emotions result in an increase in unusual cognitive associations and perform well at creative thinking and problem solving tasks.

Similarly to Fredrickson and Branigan's (2005) study, Isen et al (1987) showed clips from movies to induce either a positive or a neutral five minute clip. Following the movie clip, subjects then completed a problem solving task that asked the participants to attach a candle to a cork board in a way without letting it drop onto the table below. Participants were provided with one candle, some pins, one cork board and a box of matches (Isen et al, 1987). They found that the subjects who had been shown a positive clip prior to the problem solving task showed more creative methods of thinking and approaching the task, showing that positive emotion can broaden one's problem solving skills. Whereas further experiments that presented negative clips found there this to have no effect on problem solving techniques (Isen et al, 1987).

-Isen, Daubman and Nowicki (1987) Positive Affect Facilitates Creative Problem Solving *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 52(6), pp1122-1131.

## 3. Positive emotions help to **rebalance/undo negative emotions**.

Fredrickson and colleagues (2000) found that inducing positive emotion could undo the cardiovascular effects of negative emotions, helping to regulate and temper negative experiences.

Fredrickson and colleagues (2000) found that inducing positive emotion could undo the cardiovascular effects of negative emotions, helping to regulate and temper negative experiences. Subjects initially had to take part in an anxiety inducing task in which the experimenter asked the participants to prepare a three minute presentation to present on a chosen topic and that there would be a 50% chance they would have to present it to the other participants (Fredrickson et al, 2000). This led the subjects to have an increased heart rate, making them feel uneasy about the task in a very limited amount of time. This allowed the experimenter to induce anxiety in the participants before watching either a funny, contented, neutral or sad film. Post film watching, participants had to complete an emotion report form to assess how they felt in both parts of the task; the speech preparation and film watching. During all of these aspects of the tasks, subject's heart rates were monitored and results found that watching either an amusing clip or a clip exhibiting contentment, was more likely to reduce heart rate after feeling anxious (Fredrickson et al, 2000). This study shows that negative emotions such as anxiety can be reduced or 'undone' by positive emotions of amusement or contentment. Despite these results however, one limitation of the design was identified that found that perhaps the movies presented for sad and neutral emotions could perhaps evoke faster heart-rates and thus will result in an increase in recovery time from negative experiences (Fredrickson et al, 2000).

In short, the Broaden and Build theory is theorized around the basis that positive events and emotions help to expand ourselves psychologically, socially, physically and intellectually whilst negative emotions and events can constrict us in these domains (Fredrickson, 2004); limiting the way one can cope when faced with negativity.

### An additional point...

The theory additionally suggests that the more positive a person is, the better they are at dealing with negativity. Higher incidences of positivity, be it positive experiences or positive emotions help to develop resilience. Resilient individuals have been found to be more optimistic and active in their life approaches (Fredrickson, 2004).

"the broaden-and-build theory makes the bolder prediction that experiences of positive emotions might also, over time, build psychological resilience, not just reflect it." (Fredrickson, 2001)

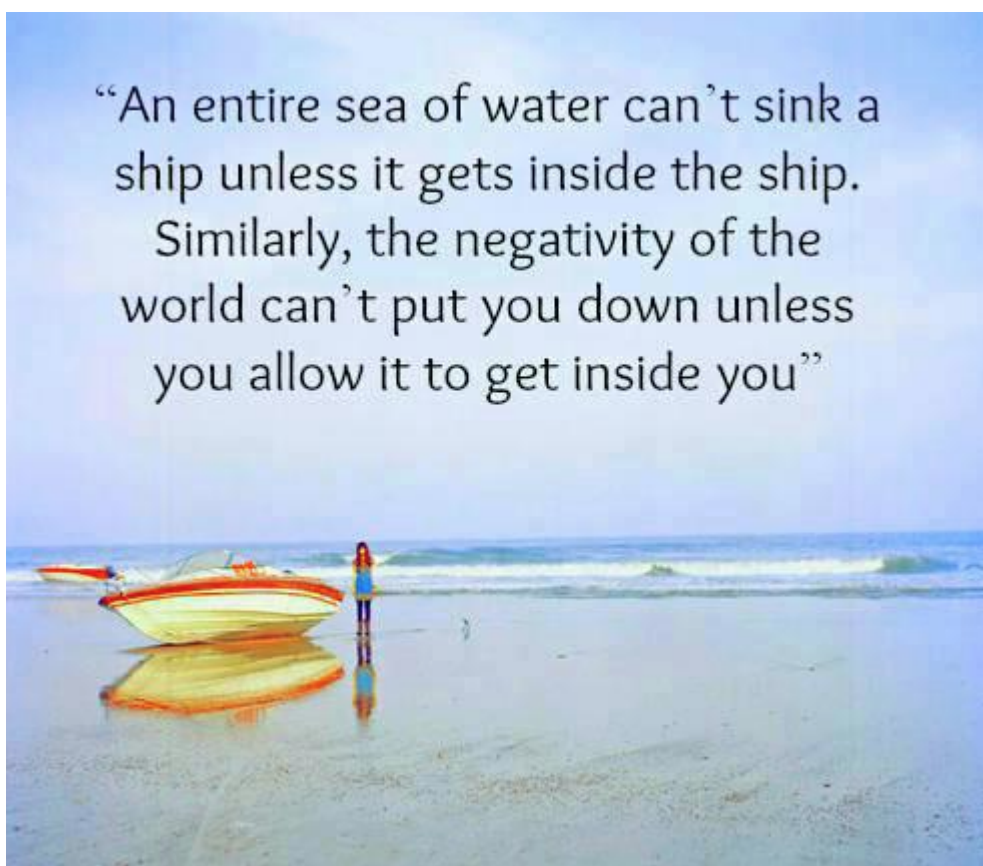
The link between resilience and positive emotion can be understood further in a key study that looked at the differences in coping post the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Fredrickson et al (2003) found that despite the horrors that came with the aftermath of the attacks, positive emotions such as love, interest and gratitude helped to decrease depressive symptoms, helping individuals to cope with such tragedy.

Resilient individuals have also been found to use humour as a method of coping (Fredrickson, 2004) and this can be linked to humour and bereavement.

Humour and death is perhaps not the likeliest of connections but it has been found to be a useful tool in making the best of negative events. Keltner and Bonanno (1997) found that laughter and bereavement can work together to help aid effective recovery from negative events such as death. Their study consisted of 40, recently widowed individuals who completed a self report questionnaire and then took part in a grief symptom interview. They found that laughter during an interview about their deceased spouse helped to alleviate negative emotions and aid social interactions with other post their partners death.

Greys Anatomy Youtube clip at Georges Funeral related to laughter and bereavement .

The Broaden and Build Theory thus comprises of multiple aspects and helps to explain the importance of positive emotions across psychological, physical and social domains and the benefit that positive emotions can have for balancing negative emotions or bad perspectives. However, much of the research in this area has been carried out by Fredrickson and colleagues, this is perhaps not an immediate limitation but does suggest that further, varied research is necessary to provide broader evidence on this incredibly interesting theory.



**by Karolina Kapustinskaite**

"Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think. Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draws it." – Buddha



Mindfulness is a technique that has its roots in the Buddhist tradition and dates back a few thousand years. Over the past decades it has also become increasingly popular in the Western world, both as a spiritual practice and as a way of strengthening one's mind without any religious connotations. In a contemporary definition, mindfulness can be described as the action of "attending nonjudgmentally to all stimuli in the internal and external environments" (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Furthermore, mindful thinking is sometimes compared to a Beginner's mind – a concept that comes from Zen Buddhism and which refers to looking at experiences as if for the first time, without any preconceptions or habitual thought patterns. In her article *Mindfulness: A call for clarification* (2009), positive psychologist Kirsten Cronlund explains in more colloquial terms that mindfulness means being fully conscious and attentive at present, witnessing the outer stimulus as well as own emotional inner workings. Once a mindful state is achieved, decision-making is a natural outcome (rather than an exhausting effort) of being in tune with both these environments.

Mindfulness is a sophisticated form of cognitive activity that can be developed through meditation. There are many different kinds of meditation: some are designed to help one relax, while others are meant to produce altered states of consciousness. However, mindfulness meditation is unique in that it is not directed toward changing from what one already is. Instead, it helps become aware of what is already true, moment by moment.



Marra (2004) proposes five strategies for becoming more mindful:

(1) *Be mindful of one thing at a time:*

Mindfulness requires consciously focused attention towards one idea, feeling, or sensation held in consciousness.

(2) *Be mindful of the moment*

Choose to fully observe what is happening in your internal and external experience right now. Focus on the fact that we are only ever living in the now, not the past or the future.



*(3) Focus on your senses*

Apply mindful awareness to the whole bodily experience, noticing what you see, hear, taste, feel, and smell.

*(4) Be nonjudgmental*

Mindfulness means to observe your present-moment experience with curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love (Siegel, 2007). An important point in mindfulness is not labeling any one aspect of experience as good or bad because as you stop trying to avoid things that feel uncomfortable, they lose their power over you.

*(5) Describe your experience*

Describe your internal and external experience with language, without using any judgmental words or how things should feel.

Following these strategies mindfulness can enable the practitioner to reach an emotional balance, to act more wisely, and not be directed by the less adaptive immediate responses that are often triggered during times of stress.

**Example - Mindful Walking** [Comment on section](#)

(1) Begin your walk by acknowledging that you are beginning to walk mindfully.

(2) Get into the mindset of exploring your inner and outer sensations of walking *as you experience them*.

(3) As you walk, firstly pay attention to the sensations in your body. Feel the contact your feet make with the ground. Which part of your foot leaves the ground last at the end of each step? Which part strikes the ground first at the beginning of each step?

Feel the bend in your knee as you walk. Explore what each part of your body is feeling.

Explore the environment, too. This may be a sensation such as noticing the temperature of the wind or feeling the ground change underfoot.

(4) Does any part of your body feel uncomfortable?

Notice every sensation, not just the pleasant ones but also those you would like to ignore. Do not exaggerate them. As each experience appears in your awareness, simply acknowledge it without engaging with it and let it go by.

(5) Walk around for another five minutes or so and simply acknowledge any experience that arises.

You may have a thought such as "Is the five minutes up yet?" or a feeling such as boredom, contentment or annoyance, and that is completely fine.

It may help you if you think of yourself figuratively 'nodding your head' or waving to the experience, or if you simply say to yourself 'there's boredom' or 'I'm now observing the temperature'.

Finish your mindful walk by acknowledging a particular place or time at which you end the exercise.

**Clinical Applications of Mindfulness** [Comment on section](#)

During the past few decades, mindfulness has been applied in clinical psychology. As a practice that helps control one's emotions, it has been noted to be a useful technique in a broad range of chronic disorders and problems. For instance, a meta-analysis of mindfulness health benefits reported that improvements were consistently seen across a spectrum of standardized mental health measures including psychological dimensions of quality of life scales, depression, anxiety, coping style and other affective dimensions of disability (Grossman et al., 2004). It is used with intervention techniques such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and the Eight Point Program (EPP) which have been shown to increase patients' well-being (Shapiro et al., 2008). However, there are some problems with the research on mindfulness benefits. For instance, the measurement of well-being has not yet been universally agreed upon, which poses problems for attempts to create a link with this meditational practice. Moreover, in the study by Shapiro and others (2008) it was theorised that mindfulness may benefit health while the practice lasts but long-term effects need to be better explored. In addition, another study found that such positive effects on health may not be due to mindfulness specifically but rather to meditational practice in general as benefits were very similar compared to another meditational practice - transcendental meditation (Schoormans and Nyklíček, 2011).

Nevertheless, it seems that meditation may help elevate positive emotions and influence life outcomes. Frederickson (2008) proposed that this may be possible due to an increase in personal resources in people who engage in meditative practices. Such resources prepare people to deal with threatening situations and crises and since our past experiences hugely influence how we feel at present, this may lead to increased well-being and happiness in the future.

In conclusion, while the methodology of research reporting health benefits of mindfulness and other forms of meditation is somewhat inconsistent and much still needs to be explored, it may nevertheless be a promising area of future research.

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## Summary

This wiki page provides a comprehensive overview of the idea of rebalancing good and bad perspectives. Findings have shown that being optimistic is beneficial for overall well-being and can increase an individual's chances of success. Generally the theories mentioned above focus on adopting an optimistic outlook as opposed to a pessimistic perspective. There does not appear to be many theories that focus on the idea of rebalancing good and bad perspectives. The Broaden and Build Theory suggests that instead of rebalancing, positive emotions can 'undo' negativity and help the individual cope when faced with negative events or emotions. Mindfulness, a meditative practice, has been addressed as one method that individuals can engage in to aid positive affect by increasing one's awareness and personal resources.

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