

Positive Self-Talk Leads to Success

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Good Things Come to Those Who Believe

-- By Leanne Beattie, Health and Motivation Writer

Most people are naturally motivated—even excited—when they begin a new exercise routine or adopt a healthier diet. You’ve got your goals set, a plan to reach them, and nothing can get in your way!

But as time goes by, the novelty wears off and your optimistic attitude can give way to feelings of doubt and dissatisfaction. Or even worse, you start comparing yourself with everyone else, mentally beating yourself up for not being as “good” or successful as they are. These negative thoughts and feelings are especially common when you’re not seeing results despite your hard work.

Sure, it’s much easier to fill your head with negative self-talk than it is to give yourself a mental pep talk. But the latter is exactly what you need to do in order to stay on track.

What you think about while you exercise, for example, affects whether or not you’ll finish today’s, tomorrow’s and even next week’s workout. If you can focus on the positives instead of the flaws when you look in the gym mirrors, you’ll be more likely to keep your appointment with the treadmill. But when your thoughts are negative or you’re comparing your thighs with someone else’s, you’re more likely to feel insecure and unmotivated, which means you’ll stop early and maybe not show up tomorrow. Researchers agree.

In a recent study from the University of Wisconsin in Whitewater, 92 female college students exercised on a stationary bike for 30 minutes, while reading one of two randomly assigned magazines (Oxygen, a women’s fitness magazine or, O the Oprah magazine, a general interest publication), or nothing at all. Those who read the fitness magazine reported more feelings of anxiety, depression and poor mood after working out than before they started. By comparison, women who read Oprah or nothing at all experienced a boost in mood after exercising. The researchers speculate that both women and men can become depressed by viewing fitness (and fashion) magazines because they feel they’ll never look as good as the models they see.

What you tell yourself while you walk the extra mile or turn down a co-worker’s brownie will often determine whether you’ll successfully reach your goals or give up in frustration along the way. When you compare yourself with others (in real life or in print) or think negatively about all the parts of your body that bother you, you’re more likely to skimp on your workout routine. When you tell yourself, “no sugar this week”; then you’re more likely to obsess over the one thing you told yourself that you can’t have, and then dig in to a whole plate of brownies instead of enjoying just one. In essence, it’s your own thoughts that may be keeping you from maintaining a consistent nutrition and exercise program.

So how do you even begin if positive self-talk doesn’t come naturally to you? Start by appreciating your efforts and giving yourself a pat on the back for the good choices that you make, no matter how small.

If that doesn’t work for you, imagine that you are talking to a friend. Would you tell her that she hadn’t lost enough weight? That his arms are too skinny? Or that she should spend more time at the gym if she ever hopes to look better in a bikini? Of course not. You would cheer on your best friend for every small accomplishment, encouraging him when he feels down or telling her all the things you love about her. So why can’t you treat yourself with the same kindness and consideration?

Next, try to be more aware of your thoughts at all times. Be mindful of thoughts that come and go, and those that linger. Consciously decide to think more positively. When you notice negative self-talk in action, nip it in the bud—don't convince yourself that your actions are pointless, that your goals aren't attainable, or that you don't deserve to be successful. Whether you think you'll succeed or fail, your thoughts will become your reality. Be a success. Boost yourself up whenever you can. Be your own best friend. Have faith in yourself and the results will come! The important thing is to feel that you're worth the effort. You deserve to be healthy and confident and strong.

It's been said that our minds can only hold one thought at a time, which means we have a choice: We can focus on a thought that makes us feel badly or we can focus on something that makes us feel good. Every second that passes is a chance to turn things around. Even if you didn't eat well at lunch, you can do better at dinner. You're not a failure if you didn't go to the gym last week. You can go today. The only thing holding you back is your thinking.