

reasons, I did feel better. Perhaps I can think about the interview, what I learned from it and apply that to a new application.

... And banish fear of failure

Everyone fears doing something new because we don't wait to fail. The truth is, we can do much more and much better than we expect if we take action, stop negative thinking, and shift our perceptions of the truth about our abilities.

Action step: force yourself to stop thinking about reasons you can't do something, even if you don't feel brave or capable. Every time a negative thought creeps in, retrain your brain to think a positive thought about your abilities instead. Then take small actions every day toward achieving your goal or desired change. Nike, the sports company, has a great slogan which works for this – “Just do it”.

What are your own ideas of positive-mindedness?

Have you other ways or habits which put you in a constructive frame of mind, which help with problem-solving and can stress away?

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Putting “positive psychology” into action

Positive psychology is a recent branch of psychology which has the main purpose of finding out scientifically (in psychological science) how and why things go well in our lives, instead of looking only at psychological problems.

“The power of positive thinking” is a phrase heard all too often ... maybe so often that it nearly becomes meaningless. Of course, we'd all agree that thinking positively is a good thing. Especially when we're feeling positive. ... But is it between hard and impossible when things are going badly?

Scientists are finding that positive thinking really does change your brain – not magically, but in a real physical way!

The changes are on account of what's called neuroplasticity. It means that our thoughts can change the structure and function of our brains. The idea was first introduced by William James back in 1890, but it was soundly rejected then, because people believed that our brains were very rigid in function – just certain parts of the brain controlling certain functions.

Now neuroscientists have found that some mental activities can be re-routed in the brain, so that we can do some tasks using different parts and pathways of our brains. The brain **even has some power to** change its own structure. These are the far frontiers of brain science, but the relevance for us now, after brain injury, is that repetitive positive thoughts and positive activities can help to rewire our brains and strengthen brain areas that stimulate positive feelings.

(There is a famous book by an American doctor called Norman Doidge which sets this out – the book is called “**The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science**”).

So positive thinking really does have some power!

When we have positive emotions, we are more likely to view an issue and its solutions more broadly – to be more creative and flexible in our responses – and so we're stronger socially, emotionally and mentally to cope well with challenges.

Here are four positive-minded exercises and activities to try – try them out and see your life with a more positive outlook!

1 Write in gratitude

Think of someone you feel grateful to and write them a letter. Contact the person and arrange to meet. Read out your letter. ... If you feel embarrassed at this idea, think about whether the embarrassment is a conventional inhibition (and will pass quickly) while the shared experience will be moving and well-worthwhile in giving the relationship new strength.

2 Recognise your blessings

Each night for one week, look back on what has happened during the day and identify the things that have gone well for you. Write down everything and consider your role in what happened. ...The good things don't have to be impressively super-significant, but they could be something like “I handled a difficult phone call better than I thought I would”.

When you write something down, this helps you focus on the event – focusing on your part in what happened helps you gain confidence and feel a sense of control in your life.

3 Learn to worry well

Set aside half an hour a day to label as your “worry time”. During that half-hour, feel free to worry about anything you like. It's best if you have the same half-hour of each day as your “worry time” and it's best also if it's not late evening. When you have worrying thoughts coming to mind at other times, take a deep breath and put off thoughts until your allocated time.

Many people find that this helps them deal with worry in a way which contains it and stops worries from taking over.

4 Learn to be optimistic

Thoughts provide the fuel for feelings. There is an ABCDE model which helps you control your thoughts and become optimistic – turning around negative thoughts!

A is for Adversity. We all have difficult situations. Write down how what you think is difficult for you.

B is for Beliefs. What do you think about that bad situation?

C is for Consequences. How do your thoughts affect you – what do they make you feel and do?

D is for Dispute. Look for some evidence running the other way! Ask yourself what other explanation there could be.

E is for Energy. When you start to think about something differently, notice how it changes the way you feel and can generate a different outcome.

Example – Adversity: I didn't get the volunteering or part-time job I wanted. **Belief:** I know I'll just never get any occupation again because I'm so useless! **Consequences:** I feel awful and don't want to do anything except curl up at home and hide. **Dispute:** I was pretty successful before, maybe I can do loads of things well. I just wasn't right for this particular opening. They said keep in touch which they need not have done if I were useless. **Energy:** When I thought about alternative