

Healthy & Resilient You

Reclaiming the Power of Hope

Finding a way ahead during dark times



Wishing and Hoping

We toss the word *hope* around casually all the time. We *hope* others have a good day. We *hope* we get that dream job. We *hope* we don't give our guests food poisoning when we cook for them tonight.

But what exactly is hope? Is it just a form of wishful thinking? According to the experts, yes and no. Yes, it's about optimism and believing that good things are possible. It's not really hope, though, unless we **also** believe that we have the power to make those good things happen.

In short, hope happens when optimism and agency work together.

Why Hope Is Important

Positive psychology expert Dr. Shane Lopez was once quoted as saying, "Hope has the power to make bad times temporary." He argued that hope is necessary for growth, learning, and meaningful change.

Over the years, he and other researchers have found that hope is both measurable and one of the best predictors of life satisfaction and wellbeing.

BENEFITS OF HOPEFULNESS



Mental: Lowered risk of depression and anxiety, increased self-esteem and emotional wellbeing



Physical: Boosted immunity, improved circulation and respiration, minimized reaction to pain



Life Quality: Improved life-satisfaction, stronger relationships, Stronger sense of purpose and meaning

Hopelessness Is a Dark Mirror

Just as the presence of hope leads to more positive life outcomes, its absence can have the opposite effect. A consistent feeling of hopelessness can increase the risk of developing cancer and heart disease, cause or worsen depression and emotional pain, sap the joy and satisfaction out of our personal and work lives, and even lead to thoughts of suicide or self-harm. *

When we fall into hopelessness, it can be difficult to dig ourselves out. Often, that has less to do with our circumstances, and more to do with our brains.

When Our Brains Are Our Best Frenemies

The human brain is always looking for stability. If we picture the brain as a superhighway of thoughts and feelings, we could say that it doesn't like to change lanes.

When it's in a sunny and optimistic lane, it'll try to process new input and information in a way that keeps us cruising happily along. *Flat tire? We got this! We learned how to change a tire in driver's ed. And, wow, doesn't that sun feel great on our shoulders?*

Likewise, if it's in an unhappy or hopeless lane, the brain will try to keep us in a darker mood. *Flat tire? Of course. Nothing ever goes our way. Do we even know where the lug wrench is? Why is it so hot out?!?*

That's a bit of an oversimplification, but it illustrates why it can be hard for us to reclaim hope once we've lost it. Our brains will always work to preserve the status quo by sticking to a single lane, even when we're hitting a lot of potholes.

For more about the brain lane concept, check out this rumination loop content [here](#), or [here](#).

Destination: Hope

Although it can be difficult to get our brains to merge into a hopeful lane once we veer out, it's not impossible. The following tips can help.



Do something fun – Even something small that lifts your spirits can help jump-start a sense of hope. Walk outside, pet a dog, doodle, [laugh](#), read the funny pages, sing, dance, or go to a park and people or squirrel-watch. Learn how to reclaim your joy with this [webinar](#) or this [7-day series](#) from eM Life.



Remember that you have, and you can – A hopeless brain automatically says, "I can't," but that's often not true. Think back to past times you've solved problems, learned new skills, overcome something scary, or just plain survived. If you did it before, you can do it again. As many times as it takes.



Take a minute to be grateful – A [gratitude practice](#) is a simple but powerful way to counter negative or anxious thoughts and open your brain back up to hope.



Alter your perception – Practice the [3 R's of Changing Your Perspective](#) to help see things differently, break out of unhelpful ruts, and find new ways forward.



Be with your people – Isolation and loneliness can feed hopelessness (and vice versa). Make a consistent effort to [connect with friends and family](#). Hang out with like-minded individuals in person or online by joining a book club, gaming community, or volunteer organization.

Finally, remember that change is always possible, and Concern is here to help. Call us at **800.344.4222** 24/7 for immediate confidential support, and we'll help you find the combination of services, resources, and expertise you need to renew your sense of hope.

**If you believe self-harm or suicide is imminent, call 911 immediately.*

For customized tools and resources, visit Concern's Digital Hub by logging in to employees.concernhealth.com, and selecting the "Get Services" button in the upper right menu.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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