

FINDING SILVER LININGS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **10 MINS**

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

We all tend to ruminate on things that have gone wrong in our lives—a mistake we made at work, an evening that didn't go as planned. We might even think about them so often that our lives seem filled with these mishaps and disappointments. Focusing on them too much, however, can cast a pall over our lives and even be associated with depressive thinking.

Looking on the bright side even when things go wrong is a key component of optimism, which research links to lower rates of depression, a better ability to cope with stress, and more relationship satisfaction, among other benefits. While finding the silver lining on a negative experience might (understandably) make you fear turning into a Pollyanna, many of us have a tendency to look on the bright side too rarely, not too often. This exercise is designed to help you achieve a healthier balance.

TIME REQUIRED

10 minutes daily for three weeks

HOW TO DO IT

You can do this practice on paper, on a word processor, or on your phone's notes application—whatever works best for you.

1. To start, list five things that make you feel like your life is enjoyable, enriching, or worthwhile at this moment. These things can be as general as “being in good health” or as specific as “drinking a delicious cup of coffee this morning.” The purpose of this first step is to help you get into a positive state of mind about your life in general.
2. Next, think about the most recent time when something didn't go your way, or when you felt frustrated, irritated, or upset.
3. In a few sentences, briefly describe the situation.
4. Then, list three things that can help you see the bright side of this situation. For example, perhaps you missed your bus this morning. Three ways to look on the bright side of this situation might be:
 - Even though you missed the bus, you got some good exercise when you were running to catch it.
 - You're fortunate to live in a city where there was another bus just 10 minutes later, or where buses run reliably at all.
 - Ten years from now, you likely won't remember what happened this morning.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sergeant, S., & Mongrain, M. (2014). [An online optimism intervention reduces depression in pessimistic individuals.](#) *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 82(2), 263-274.

After completing Finding Silver Linings and the [Goal Visualization](#) exercises daily for three weeks, people reported

greater engagement in life and less negative thinking than before. Those who had a tendency to be pessimistic especially benefited from the exercises and showed fewer depressive symptoms afterward. These effects seemed to wear off two months later, though, suggesting it's helpful to repeat this practice periodically.

Who Has Tried The Practice?

Participants in the above study were all English speakers from Asia, Canada, and the United States, with mostly European or Asian ancestry. Around 65% of the participants were female, and 85% had received at least some post-secondary education.

Additional research has engaged members of other groups:

- [Participants in Canada](#) across genders, ages, and education levels improved in well-being after practicing Finding Silver Linings.
- [Working-class people in Canada](#) also benefitted from Finding Silver Linings. Participants were mostly female, white, Christian, and highly educated.

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

WHY TO TRY IT

Looking on the bright side of life in general, or of a bad situation in particular, can increase happiness by boosting your sense of self-worth, motivating you to go after your goals, and enhancing your enjoyment of life. Regularly completing the silver linings exercise can help you get in the habit of recognizing positive aspects of your life and seeing the upside to challenging situations rather than fixating on the downsides. With repeated practice, you may find that it comes more naturally to look on the bright side, even when faced with difficulties in your life.

SOURCES

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FOR MORE

Check out the [Goal Visualization practice](#), which was developed and studied in tandem with this Silver Linings practice.

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

