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Positive Health and Wellbeing:  
What does the science tell us?

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*Founding Director, RCSI Institute of Leadership*

*Founding Chair, RCSI Department of Psychology*

HSE OPEN Disclosure, Dublin  
15<sup>th</sup> March 2023



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Centre for Positive  
Health Sciences

Our mission is to educate, nurture and discover to  
enhance health and well-being through the practice  
of positive psychology and lifestyle medicine.



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receive updates about upcoming courses.

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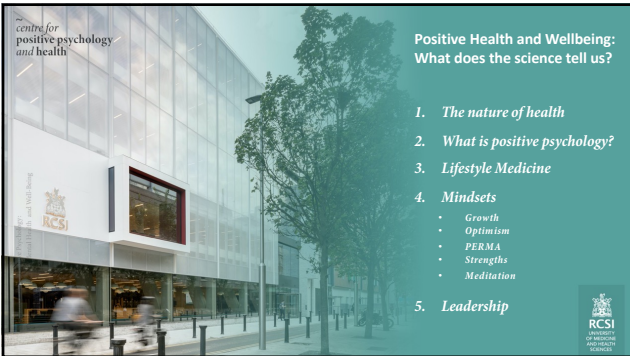
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Positive Health and Wellbeing:  
What does the science tell us?

1. The nature of health
2. What is positive psychology?
3. Lifestyle Medicine
4. Mindsets
  - Growth
  - Optimism
  - PERMA
  - Strengths
  - Meditation
5. Leadership



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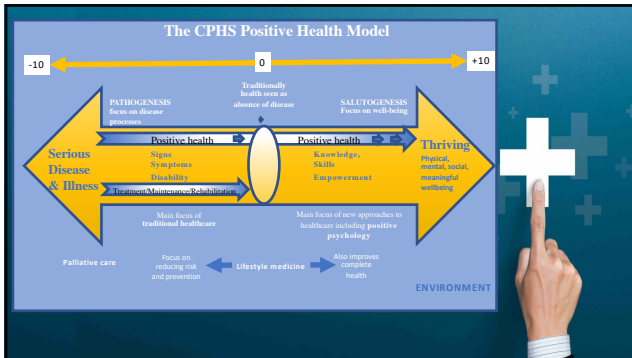
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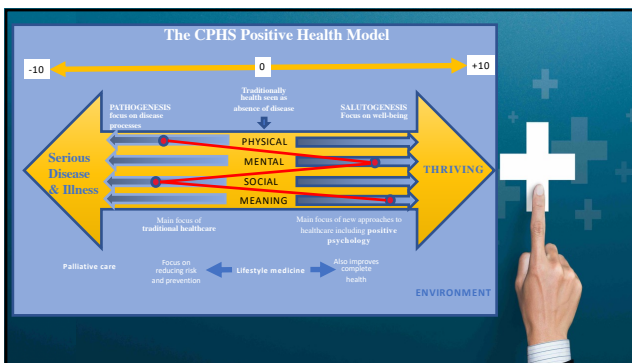
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**What is Positive Psychology?**

*"The scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive"*  
(Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

- Based on the fundamental insight that treating mental illness is not the same as promoting mental health.
- Focus is not just on the absence of the negative.
- Joy, serenity, courage, optimism, peace, love, strength etc are important.

Lopez SJ, Snyder CR (2009) The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology (2nd Ed.) Oxford, Oxford University Press.

**POSITIVE HEALTH**

100+ Research-based Positive Psychology and Lifestyle Medicine Tools to Enhance Your Wellbeing

Jolanta Burke, Pádraic J. Dunne, Trudy Meehan, Claron A. O'Shaughnessy and Christian van Nieuwerburgh

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## Lifestyle Medicine


“The application of environmental, behavioural, medical and motivational principles to the management of lifestyle related health problems in a clinical setting, including self-care and management”  
(Egger et al, 2017; Frates et al, 2019)

### The 6 Pillars of Lifestyle Medicine

- Diet
- Physical Activity
- Sleep
- Stress management
- Relationships
- Substance use

Egger G, Binns A, Rosser S, Sagner M. (2017) *Lifestyle Medicine* (3rd ed.) London, Academic Press

Frates B, Bunnet JP, Joseph J, Peterson JA. (2019). *Lifestyle Medicine Handbook: An Introduction To The Power Of Healthy Habits*. CA, Healthy Learning.



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## FIXED and GROWTH MINDSETS?

	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Intelligence	Static	Can be developed
Desire	Look smart	Learn
Challenges	Avoid	Embrace
Obstacles	Give up easily	Persist
Effort	Seen as fruitless or worse	Seen as path to mastery
Criticism	Ignore useful negative feedback	Learn from criticism
Success of others	Feel threatened	Find lessons and inspiration
Outcome	Plateau early; Achieve less; Deterministic world view	Reach ever higher levels of achievement; Greater sense of free will

Carol Dweck, Ph.D.

**mindset**

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS

HOW WE CAN LEARN TO FULLY USE OUR POTENTIAL

—opening chapters—  
—valued relationships—



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## The Journey to a Growth Mindset

- Embrace challenges
- Persist in the face of setbacks
- See effort as part of the journey
- Learn from criticism
- Find inspiration in the resilience of others
- Tap into your “calling”



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“...The greater power  
of bad events over good  
ones is found in everyday  
life...”

— Baumeister R et al. (2001) Bad is stronger than good.  
Rev Gen Psych 5(4), 323-370



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**3 good things**

Begin to keep a daily journal in which you write down, preferably before going to sleep, three things that went well today and reflect on why they went well. Do this for a week at least and best to continue the practice indefinitely.



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**Optimism mindset**

**Altering pessimism:**

1. Tune in to your most catastrophic thoughts
2. Treat them as if said to you by someone whose goal in life is to make you miserable
3. Argue back and dispute as you would to a person, rationally

Seligman M. (1998) *Learned Optimism*. NY, Alfred Knopf

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**JAMA Network | Open**

Original Investigation | Cardiology

## Association of Optimism With Cardiovascular Events and All-Cause Mortality

### A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

Alan Rozanski, MD; Chirag Bavishi, MD, MPH; Laura D. Kubzansky, PhD; Randy Cohen, MD

**Abstract**

**IMPORTANCE** Optimism and pessimism can be easily measured and are potentially modifiable mindsets that may be associated with cardiovascular risk and all-cause mortality.

**OBJECTIVE** To conduct a meta-analysis and systematic review of the association between optimism and risk for future cardiovascular events and all-cause mortality.

**DATA SOURCES AND STUDY SELECTION** PubMed, Scopus, and PsycINFO electronic databases were systematically searched from inception through July 2, 2019, to identify all cohort studies investigating the association between optimism and pessimism and cardiovascular events and/or all-cause mortality by using the following Medical Subject Heading terms: optimism, optimistic explanatory style, pessimism, outcomes, endpoint, mortality, death, cardiovascular events, stroke, coronary artery disease, coronary heart disease, ischemic heart disease, and cardiovascular disease.

**DATA EXTRACTION AND SYNTHESIS** Data were screened and extracted independently by 2 investigators (A.R. and C.B.). Adjusted effect estimates were used, and pooled analysis was performed using the Hartung-Knapp-Sidik-Jonkman random effects model. Sensitivity and subgroup analyses were performed to assess the robustness of the findings. The Meta-analysis of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (MOOSE) reporting guideline was followed.

**Key Points**

**Question** Is a mindset of optimism associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular events and all-cause mortality?

**Findings** In this meta-analysis of 15 studies including 229 391 individuals, optimism was associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular events and pessimism was associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular events; the pooled association was similar to that of other well-established **cardiovascular risk factors**.

**Meaning** The findings suggest that a mindset of optimism is associated with lower cardiovascular risk and that promotion of optimism and reduction in pessimism may be important for preventing health.

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## PERMA Mindset

**Positive Emotion.** Experiencing positive emotions such as happiness, joy, excitement, contentment etc

**Engagement.** Fulfilment by engaging in activities which are interesting and absorbing - that help us to achieve a sense of 'flow' - contented immersion in an activity where sense of self and time is suspended.

**Relationships.** Nurturing healthy relationships with those around us is important for our overall happiness; provides attachment, support, feeling valued and being loved.

**Meaning.** Meaning and purpose in our daily lives is crucial for happiness. Involves pursuing highly valued goals and often serving something bigger than ourselves

**Accomplishment.** Important for giving us feelings of mastery and achievement.

Seligman MEP (2011) *Flourish*. NY: Free Press

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## Burnout, meaning and purpose

1. Meaning and purpose in life are synergistic and can fuel sustained engagement and creativity particularly in times of adversity.
2. Physicians "sense of calling" strongly associated with meaning in life and inversely associated with burnout.
3. Finding meaning in work protects physicians and nurses from burnout.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. *Taking Action Against Clinician Burnout: A Systems Approach to Professional Well-Being*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25521>. pp98-99.

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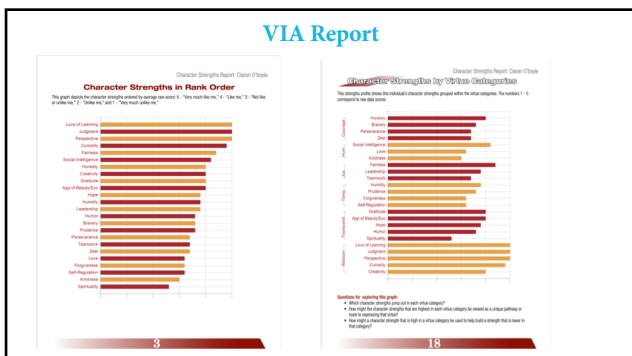
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## Using Your Signature Strengths

- Identify your signature strengths
- Use them in relationships, work and leisure
- Choose work that lets you use them every day
- Recraft your work to use your strengths
- Managers: make room for your people to use their strengths

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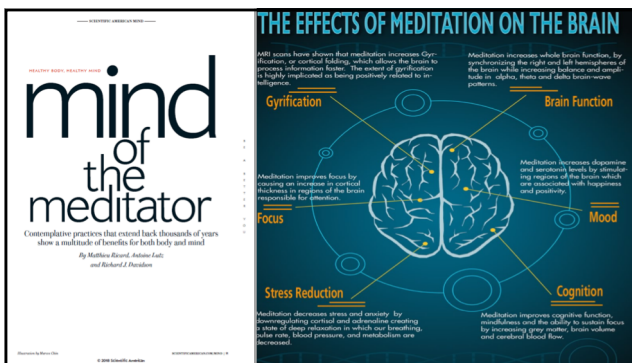
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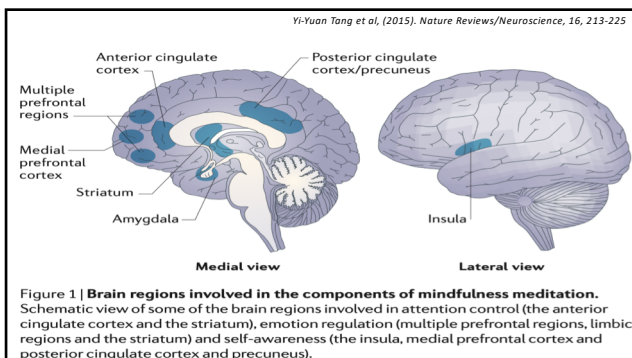
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**ABT programme**  
3,292 views · Last updated on 8 Jun 2020

**RCSI Attention Based Training Programme**

<https://www.rcsi.com/positivpsychology>

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*"I put my heart and soul into my work and have lost my mind in the process"*  
Vincent Van Gogh

The answer is not creating more resilient canaries!

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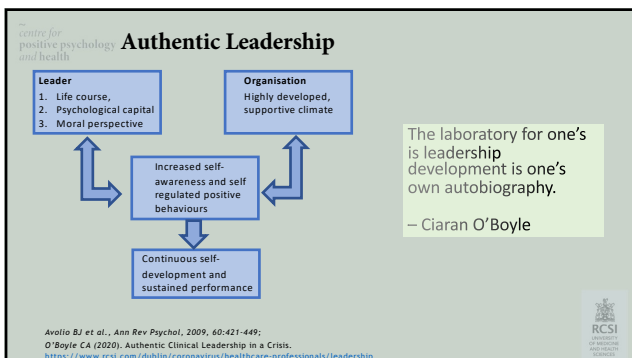
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<https://www.mindgarden.com/69-authentic-leadership-questionnaire>

## Authentic Leadership

- **Know yourself** - demonstrating understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and the way one makes sense of the world
- **Do the right thing** - being guided by internal moral perspectives that are used to self-regulate one's behaviour
- **Be genuine and compassionate** - presenting one's authentic self through openly sharing information and feelings as appropriate for situations
- **Be fair-minded** - objectively analysing relevant data before making a decision

Avolio BJ et al., *Ann Rev Psychol*, 2009, 60:421-449;  
O'Boyle CA (2020). Authentic Clinical Leadership in a Crisis.  
<https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/coronavirus/healthcare-professionals/leadership>

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Developing you authentic leadership



1. Learn from your life story
2. Become self-aware
3. Practice your values and principles
4. Balance your extrinsic and intrinsic motivations
5. Build your support team
6. Integrate your life by staying grounded
7. Empower people to lead

Sources: George B et al, *Discovering your authentic leadership*, HBR, Feb 2007; 129-138; Reichard RJ, Avolio BJ. 2005. Where are we? The status of leadership intervention research: a meta-analytic summary. In *Authentic Leadership and Practice: Origins, Effects, and Development*, ed. WJ Gardner, Routledge, 2019, pp. 303-36. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315436421-14>

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## Turning Organisations Positive

Our major error is that we try to learn exclusively from the **past** rather than from the **future** as it emerges. -  
-Otto Scharmer, MIT

### Changing the music

1. Create a Sense of Purpose
2. Nurture Authentic Conversations
3. See possibility
4. Embrace the Common Good
5. Trust the Emergent Process

Quinn R. (2015). *The Positive Organisation*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler




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## Positive Practices and Organisational Effectiveness

Intervention study 2005 -2007 in 29 nursing units in the US.

Units that improved most by implementing 6 positive practices: **caring, compassionate support, forgiveness, inspiration, meaning and respect, integrity and gratitude** showed significant increases in measures of:

- Patient satisfaction with pain management
- Organisational climate
- Participation in hospital affairs
- Foundations for quality care
- Resource adequacy
- Support of nurses by managers
- Nurse/physician relationships

Cameron KS, Mora C, Leutscher T, Calarco M (2011). Effects of positive practices on organisational effectiveness. *J Appl Beh Sci*, 47(3): 266-308

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## Positive Management

1. Make meetings uplifting; and end on a positive note
2. Celebrate and prolong good news
3. In challenging situations, focus on the things we can control
4. Avoid continuously recycling negativity
5. Map out team strengths
6. Show appreciation and gratitude
7. Help staff identify the meaning of their their contribution
8. Take care of one's own health (sleep, diet, physical activity)

Fredrickson BL (2009). *Positivity*. New York, Crown Publishers; Cameron K. (2012 ) *Positive Leadership*. CA: Berrett-Koehler. Niemiec RM. (2017) *Character Strengths Interventions*. Boston, Hogrefe.

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## The Deficit vs the Abundance Approach

© C O'Boyle

	The Deficit(or problem-solving) Approach:	The Abundance Approach:
Approach:	1. Identify the key problems and challenges 2. Generate alternative solutions based on root causes 3. Evaluate and choose the best solution 4. Implement and follow up to show the problem is solved	1. Identify peak experiences when individuals and organization at their best 2. Identify and understand the enablers of optimal performance 3. Create sustainable impact by continuing and further developing the enablers of optimal performance 4. Design interventions to create ideal, desired future based on optimal performance
Role of manager	Identifying and solving problems	Identifying and actualising potential
Success:	Problems solved.	Triple bottom line: People, Planet, Profit
Focus:	Negative	Positive

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Home > About > Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences > Centre for Positive Health Sciences <https://www.rcsi.com/cphs>

- Professional Diploma in Positive Health
- Masters in Positive Health Coaching
- PhD in Positive Health
- Professional Doctorate, Positive Health
- The Science of Happiness (General, Young people, Ageing)

**Register your interest**  
Join our mailing list to learn more about the RCSI Centre for Positive Health Sciences and receive updates about upcoming courses. **SIGN UP NOW**

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## Mindsets: The Way of the Stoic

“The chief task in life is simply this: to identify and separate matters so that I can say clearly to myself which are externals not under my control, and which have to do with the choices I actually control. Where then do I look for good and evil? Not to the uncontrollable externals, but within myself to the choices that are my own...”

Epictetus: *Discourses* 2.5.4-5

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## Resources: Positive Psychology

- Boniwell I. (2012) *Positive Psychology in a Nutshell*. Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- Burke J, Dunne PJ, Meehan T, O'Boyle CA, Van Nieuwerburgh C. (2022). *Positive Health: 100+ Research-based Positive Psychology and Lifestyle Medicine Tools to Enhance Your Well-being*. London, Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi M. (2002). *Flow*. Random House, London.
- Dweck CS. (2008) *Mindset*. Balantine, New York
- Fredrickson B. (2009) *Positivity*. Crown, New York.
- Fredrickson B. (2014) *Love 2.0*. Plume, New York
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- Layard R. (2011) *Happiness*. Penguin, New York
- Seligman MEP. (2003) *Authentic Happiness*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London
- Seligman MEP (2011) *Flourish*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London

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## Resources: Lifestyle Medicine

- Bodai BL, Nakarta TE, Wong TW et al. (2018). Lifestyle medicine: A brief review of its dramatic impact on health and survival. *Permanente Journal*, 22:17-025; <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/17-025>
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## Resources: Positive Organisations

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- Quinn RE. (2015). *The Positive Organisation: Breaking Free From Conventional Cultures, Constraints, and Beliefs*. Oakland, Berrett-Koehler.

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