The impulse to spring clean may be genetic—similar to molting, rebirth, renewal—like the phoenix rising from the winter’s cold, damp ashes. It’s a time to purge cluttered closets, basements, and garages of things we can’t seem to get rid of. Our minds may need a scrubbing too. The mind is like an attic, often crammed with things that we don’t need, including all our past emotional baggage, doubts, petty grievances, and self-defeating thoughts.

Research has shown that our thoughts and emotions have an impact on all aspects of our lives. Affect is an emotion or subjectively experienced feeling, and multiple studies suggest that optimal mental health requires the maximizing of positive affect and the minimizing of negative affect.\(^1,2\)

Negative mood can be a consequence of chronic unresolved stress and also a way to influence those around us. Negative mood is usually the result of irrational thinking about people or events, and it is often magnified when we focus on feelings rather than the cause of the problem or its solution. Unfortunately, the more we focus on trying to change how bad we feel, the more difficult it is to change those feelings. Chronic negative mood can affect our health, productivity, and relationships and is a clear warning sign that we need to make some changes.

In addition, a group member’s negative mood will influence the emotions experienced by other members. Furthermore, their negativity will have an impact on how they contribute to team processes and subsequently have a negative impact on the overall performance of the team.

It is normal to feel negative occasionally. Each of us has our ups and downs. We live busy lifestyles; everyday necessities pile up, take over, and drain our bodies and minds of energy, leaving us feeling discouraged, irritable, and fatigued—a sign that our bodies are stressed beyond natural limits. However, we can choose how we want to cope with these moods and take the opportunity to energize and recharge the mind and body. It is not easy. Yet, according to experts, with a few changes and by adopting some new habits, we can overcome the ever-present exhaustion.

Energy is the ability to do work. How we accomplish this work has to do with intent and how we use our thoughts to create the actions we take. Whether we define ourselves as weak or as strong, we tend to take on activities that prove us right.\(^3\)

Furthermore, our thinking habits reveal how we interpret our circumstances. When a negative emotion arises, the body tenses and the mind finds it difficult to focus. We begin to doubt our capabilities. Doubt is thinking about ourselves in a negative, vulnerable way, or imagining that we are not skilled in handling things, even when the facts show otherwise. Doubt causes us to stop actively participating in and enjoying life, because we get bogged down by self-criticism, second guessing, and over-analyzing situations. Doubt also causes us to put needless obstacles in our way, leading to ineffective action and causing sadness, anxiety, fear, frustration, and lack of energy.

Harnessing Positive Energy

Sometimes the hardest thing to do when we are exhausted, deflated, tired, and fed-up can be to pull ourselves out of it. While a lack of energy seems to contribute to more exhaustion, energy starts to reappear if we find ways to encourage more positive drive.

The term “positive energy” is not well-defined, and it is used in a number of ways. In its simplest usage, positive energy can be described as a bundle of desirable attributes. Most experts agree that people with positive energy are determined to do their best, and to see the best in the world around them. Self-awareness and pinpointing our best qualities are suggested as the key elements in developing positive attributes and personal energy.\(^3\) Positive people tend to gravitate to each other. Positivity feels good, and it becomes contagious. Unchecked negativity produces damaging emotions such as anger, contempt, and dislike. It can also be transmittable.\(^3,4\)

Emotions reflect the sense we make out of our current circumstances. They stem from our daily activities and our entrenched mental habits. These habits shape our choices in finding ways to reframe unpleasant circumstances. If we minimize the negative, we are more likely to deal better with adversities and envision solutions to problems.

Adopting a little patience and taking things a little slower provide avenues to discover more energy and positive drive. When we are harassed and hurried, demanding things of ourselves and others—to do it now—finish now, we end up exhausted and discouraged. If we
can slow down, we put less pressure and demands on our bodies and minds. We can build our energy levels by being more positive. Positivity also raises resilience levels, allowing us to react to setbacks and other circumstances in a less negative manner.

Negative thinking comes easily and uninvited. The tendency to leap from minor, trivial problems to overblown, unrealistic conclusions is something that everyone struggles with to some degree. Finding energy, motivation, and positivity is not always easy, but the benefits of a few changes can be sustaining. Research suggests that persistent inner work can change habits of thinking. To change the tone of our thoughts from negative to positive, we must be aware of our thinking habits; broaden our minds and learn to argue with ourselves; stay in the company of upbeat, positive people; embrace pride, laughter, inspiration, and love; and focus on the things for which we are grateful.  

Studies also suggest that increasing involvement in enjoyable activities counteracts negative mood and builds positive attitudes. Furthermore, activities that are in line with one’s personal values and goals are likely to be more helpful than activities that are selected more randomly. 

Change can be made in small steps, adopted in a way that they become a part of our lives. Although researchers suggest we only need daily practice to change pessimism to positive thoughts, we cannot master that in a day. We need to be aware of our thoughts every day. Negative thoughts deplete our energy reserves. Rather than living our lives on autopilot, we need to make a conscious effort to fill our minds with positive thoughts. It can be self-liberating and energizing.

Good feelings come and go, and humans are designed to react to change. When we feel good, our lives are good. We are safe and satisfied. Yet, we need to carve out time toward developing our best selves. Positive energy opens our minds, making us more receptive to joy, hope, serenity, inspiration, love, laughter, and gratitude.

**Spring Means New Beginnings**

Finally, the hopes and new beginnings of spring, like the cleaning and renewal of spaces for the mind, body, and spirit, makes us all feel better, more uplifted, motivated, and energized, creating contentment, satisfaction, and peace.

Spring is upon us. Be mindful of things around you; greet others with a smile. Say good morning to a complete stranger. Look a colleague in the eyes and ask how he is doing. Laugh with your eyes. Shake hands firmly. Sing the shower. Answer the phone cheerfully. Receive help gratefully. Drive courteously. Dance. Share your achievements. Think positively; it is a matter of choice.

**References**


* A complete index of Wellness Milestones Columns can be found on the AANA Wellness Program homepage at www.aanawellness.com