

- Virtue / Lifestyles / Habit

## 7 ways to REFRESH YOUR OPTIMISM

Clinical psychologist Karen Nimmo on how to feel up when things seem down.

Wairarapa Times-Age · 5 Feb 2025 · 15 · Karen Nimmo is a clinical psychologist.

You want to hit refresh – not just on your own life, but the world at large. You're back at work, still hurting from the miserly summer weather. Now, with wildfires, tornados, divisive politics the world over and tensions hanging over Waitangi Day, it's hard to spark your inner optimism.



You want to be hopeful about what lies ahead but you're not sure how. Everywhere you look, everything you read, seems to point to struggle. So what to do? How can you feel good about life amid the chaos of a changing world?

As a psychologist, I'm not a fan of blind optimism – in fact, I'm an anti-fan.

Being optimistic “no matter what” – also known as toxic positivity – stops us from accepting the reality of life as it is now. It denies us the chance to feel and process feelings, which is important for our emotional health.

But having a (realistic) optimistic default setting allows us to deal practically with the difficulties in front of us, while making plans for a better future. And it fuels hope, which means despair doesn't get a seat at the main table.

Here are some ideas to help.

Replace thinking with action

It's good to ponder your life and choices, but overthinking is a downward spiral that's hard to break. Taking action is the simplest way to get out of your head into your body, to drag your thoughts into a healthier place. Here's a warning though: consistent action is better than crazy

busyness. Habits are more useful than always going-with-the-flow. Slow and steady wins the race.

Go one day without complaining

Challenge yourself. No complaints – not about your partner, your kids, your boss, your work, your commute, the news, the economy, the leader of your country, the leader of other people's countries, the fact that you forgot to get the one thing you went to the supermarket for.

We all put too much negativity out into the world. It's fine to have difficult feelings but we don't need to say ALL of them out loud. Or we at least need to be mindful of how our words are affecting others.

Clean up your mental diet

What are you scrolling, reading, listening to, watching? How much information are you exposing yourself to? Is it healthy – is it good for you?

This is a simple question with a surprisingly simple solution. It's the reason so many are turning away from social media – or at least cutting back. Where, and how, could you trim some mental fat?

Aim to lift someone else's mood

This is not about pushing someone who's struggling into a positive space. That's annoying and frequently the opposite of helpful. Just do something nice for someone. Surprise them. Or call or text them. You'll get the benefits vicariously. Even if it takes a while.

Say "how" instead of "can't"

Instead of just refusing to do something or writing it off as too hard, ask yourself "how" it could be done. Working to solve a problem always makes you feel better. Especially if you actually solve something. And even if you don't.

Be right here, right now

The present moment is all we really have. What are you doing right now – or for the rest of the day? Beyond your non-negotiable responsibilities, is it where you should invest your precious time and energy? Is it making you feel good about yourself and your life? Could you do better?

First, look for the good in someone

People drive us crazy – more crazy than anything else. But before you launch into all the reasons someone is winding you up, look for the good in them. There is good in (almost) everyone. Just aim to find one thing. And if you really can't do that, look around you. There are lots of cool, interesting, fun things in the world to look at – if you get into the habit of noticing them. As the poet Frederick Langbridge said: "Two men look out through the same bars: One sees the mud, and one the stars."

Good advice. Look up instead of down. Whenever you can, look for the stars.