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[Making Hope Happen](#)

Why Your Doctor Should Examine Your Hope

Hope and health go hand in hand.

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Rick Snyder, my hope mentor at the University of Kansas, once appeared on Good Morning America to conduct a live experiment showing hope in action. He started by introducing a classic research tool called the cold-pressor test, which uses a tank of ice water to assess pain tolerance. Then he challenged the host, Charlie Gibson, the medical expert, Dr. Tim Johnson, and the weather guy, Tony Perkins, to dunk their right fist into the tank for as long as they could stand it. Tony pulled his hand out first, and stood shaking life back into it while Charlie and Tim continued their battle of wills. Just as the segment ended, Tim gave up, but Charlie vowed to keep his hand in the freezing water throughout the break.

When they came back from the commercial, and Charlie was declared the winner, he asked Rick what the test had to do with hope. Rick's reply: His studies had shown that hopeful people consistently tolerate more pain than their less hopeful counterparts. Then he revealed that the GMA team had taken a standardized hope test prior to the show, and that their scores had accurately predicted the order in which each would call it quits.

Rick's work on hope and pain has since been replicated in numerous controlled experiments. In one study, hopeful people tolerated pain almost twice as long as people who were less hopeful.

These coping studies sparked research examining the role of hope in promoting healthy behaviors, including fruit and vegetable consumption, regular exercise, safe [sex](#) practices, and quitting [smoking](#). As explained in [Making Hope Happen](#), hope for the future was clearly linked with daily habits that support health and prevent disease.

When it comes to their health, hopeful people tend to make good choices. This is true for other people managing chronic health conditions—even for children. Professor Carla Berg (Emory University) wondered if hope in young asthma patients was associated with adherence to their treatment regimen, a daily inhaled steroid. The children, diagnosed with moderate to severe asthma, completed a youth version of the hope scale and were directed to take their [medication](#) as prescribed. With all the controls in place, Berg tracked their adherence with electronic monitoring of the child's metered dose over a 14-day period. She then examined the relationship between compliance and multiple variables, including demographic characteristics and a number of disease-related measures. Among all the factors studied, a child's hope was the only significant predictor of who followed doctors' orders.

The results linking how we think about the future to our health make me think that my doctor should be asking me questions about my hopes and [dreams](#). He never has. Has yours?

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