

# Positive thinking

For Isaac Newton, August 1665 was a hugely frustrating time: he had been awarded a scholarship which guaranteed him four years at Cambridge to pursue his studies. However, the university was shut down because of the Great Plague. Newton had to return home to Lincolnshire to continue his research alone – and came up with his theories of **calculus** and the law of gravity.

People who believe in the power of positive thought see this is a prime example of how good things can come out of a crisis. If you approach any situation in the right frame of mind, they argue, you can overcome your problems. One thing we generally lack in the modern world is time. In the months ahead, we will have plenty of it. You could use it to acquire a new skill, such as making furniture, or learning to draw properly, sew, or play a musical instrument – Charles Darwin said that if he had his life to live over again, he would have found more time for music and poetry.

While team sports are suspended, you might discover other physical activities you can still do in the open air: gardening, for instance – described by the philosopher Francis Bacon as “the purest of human pleasures”, or going for walks. William Wordsworth found walking so helpful to his thought processes that he composed some of his greatest poetry on foot, and is estimated to have covered 175,000 miles in his lifetime. Indoors, you could learn to do yoga or Pilates.

# Mind over matter

Some say that positive thinking is just a form of childish escapism: the world is full of people who believed that they were going to achieve great things, but never did. Simply expecting a situation to get better will make no difference to anything. It may even be dangerous, encouraging people to focus on changing their mind-set instead of taking action to sort things out.

Others argue that positive thinking expands the mind and helps it find solutions to apparently impossible situations. The bestselling novelist Paulo Coelho remarked, “If you really think small, your world will be small. If you think big, your world will be big.” Mahatma Gandhi believed, “A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, he becomes.”

