



Your Guide to Everyday Health

# balanced

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## *the Bright Side*

*Suzy Berschback inherited her optimistic outlook from her mother and **learned to count her blessings and focus on positivity**, Page 10*

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GOOD CAN  
**BE GOOD  
FOR YOU**

# positively powerful

*A website developed in honor of a mother's memory  
inspires others to choose happiness.*

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*Chips Ahoy!*

GROSSE POINTE FARMS, MI

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## *Suzy Berschback's mother taught her many important lessons throughout her life.*



But the most important lesson of all may have come on the day her mom passed away.

"Her kidneys shut down in October of 2013, when she was 84," Suzy remembers. "She was in the hospital and didn't like being there. She kept saying 'I'm not a hospital kind of girl,' so I eventually asked her 'What kind of girl are you, mom?' She thought about it and answered, 'I'm a happy-go-lucky girl.'"

That answer stayed with Suzy long after her mother passed away. "I kept thinking about it," says the manager of community

affairs for Beaumont Hospital in Grosse Pointe. "In her last hour, she told me not to be sad because she had a good life, she knew she was well-loved and those she loved knew they were loved too. It was her final gift to us."

Reflecting on her mom's life and her own afterwards, Suzy found herself thinking about the definition of happy-go-lucky and how to incorporate it into her life. "I decided it signifies trying to live in the moment and enjoy it, and not focus on your worries," she concluded.

So Suzy and her

Connecticut-based sister, Nancy King, launched [happygoluckygirl.me](http://happygoluckygirl.me), an inspirational website, on Thanksgiving Day in 2014.

The site spotlights uplifting books, quotes and music. It also provides self-help tools like a community blog, online resources and products such as gratitude journals.

The website ties into the growing gratitude and positive psychology movements, she says. Suzy insists even small changes can set you on the right road. "It's a choice we make every minute of every day, and the more you do it, the

better you become at it. One of the easiest things to do before you get out of bed or during dinner is to ask yourself 'What am I grateful for today?' When asking that question becomes a habit, it can change your perspective and your life."

Now in her 50s, and the mother of two daughters herself, Suzy credits her mother for her own optimistic outlook. "Happy-Go-Lucky absolutely represents who my mom was," she says. "She didn't have an easy life, and like everyone, she lost hope now and then ... but she knew that in order

## The Science Behind Positivity

Gail Elliott Patricolo, director of Beaumont Integrative Medicine, says that Suzy Berschback and other “positive living” proponents are on to something. “It’s important to understand that the mind and body work together when it comes to understanding the benefits of positive thinking,” she says. Neurologists believe we have a conscious mind that’s in a constant state of chatter. Often, as this so-called “monkey mind” is chattering away, it’s preparing the body for “flight or fight” in case a threat should arise. This constant state of low-level stress is hard on the body. “We need to move away from the part of the brain that activates the fight or flight response. Quieting the mind and giving it positive suggestions can help us be calmer and increase our happiness.”

There are a variety of ways to tap into that positive potential, she says. “It’s an individual choice. Some patients meditate, others do yoga. I had a new mother of twins who took warm, candlelit baths with soft music. It was her way of moving her body out of the stress response. Other options include spiritual practices, such as prayer or saying the rosary, quieting techniques that help people connect to things beyond themselves.” And when your mind is quiet, you can add positive suggestions. Positive imagery has been shown to quell anxiety, pain and insomnia, says Patricolo. “If you can learn to tap into the quiet part of the mind, it can be very powerful.” Suzy Berschback agrees. “There’s definitely science behind positive thinking,” she adds. “It’s a muscle that gets stronger with use.”

to get yourself out of a funk, you have to count your blessings and focus on the things that are going right. In her honor and memory, my sister and I tried to relate that to our own lives and help others do the same.”

Like all of us, Suzy occasionally struggles with a bad day. When that happens, she tries to connect with nature by walking her dog or spending time with family and friends, including members of her longtime book club. “There have been periods in my life where I have been seriously down,” says Suzy. Those include challenging

teen years, her parents’ relationship, losing a friend to suicide and her mother’s passing. “We all go through challenges. The key is to develop resilience along the way.”

Her family sometimes has to remind her to take her own advice. “I want to be someone who doesn’t just talk the talk, but walks the walk. The best way for me to honor my mother is through living a joyous life and putting positive energy out in the world. Every day, we have a choice. If we feel grateful just to wake up and get another chance, then everything else is a bonus.” ■

