

SYMPTOMS AND INFO

- Tingling
- Itching
- Sharp pain in an area of skin
- Rash and fluid-filled blisters appear after a few days.
- Headache and fever
- Tiredness
- 3-4 days later, the blisters form scabs. They drop off within 10 days but may leave scars.
- If a nerve that supplies the eye is affected it may cause a potentially serious inflammation of the cornea.
- Antiviral drugs are prescribed to reduce the severity of the symptoms and the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia (after pain). Painkillers can relieve discomfort.
- Most people who develop shingles recover within 2-6 weeks but up to half of all people over the age of 50 develop post-herpetic neuralgia.

Top exam tips for students and parents



It's almost exam time and tension is building – for students and for parents.

Here are some tips on how to survive this stressful time:

STUDENTS:

- Study in short spurts of 20 to 40 minutes at a time – this is the most productive way to work, according to the National Parents' Council
- Take five-minute breaks every 40 minutes, have a stretch and a glass of water then resume for another study session
- Eat well. Don't skip breakfast – you need the energy supply to the brain to concentrate well. Porridge or wholegrain cereal is recommended by the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute
- Have regular healthy snacks, cut back on caffeine and drink water, fruit juice or herbal tea. Herbal tea will help you sleep better. Fizzy drinks make you jittery
- Avoid any kind of weight-loss diets at this important time
- Get some exercise every day to help you relax

PARENTS

- Be around to show solidarity
- Back off a bit
- Expect outbursts
- Don't go heavy on post-mortems
- Give lots of hugs and 'I love you no matter what's' and
- Know the timetable so that there are no mix-ups

STUDENTS AND PARENTS

- Breathe in for a count of six
- Hold for six
- Then breathe out for six to help you feel calm.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Anne Robinson recently received a lifetime achievement award for 25 years fund-raising and board service to the Asthma Society of Ireland. Anne lost her son, Alex, to asthma when he was only 21. She featured on these health pages in June of last year.

For more information about asthma see www.asthma.ie

Be careful not to fall into the trap of relentless positivity at the cost of all else

Being positive is all well and good, writes **Fiona Hoban**, but not if it means suppressing emotions without having dealt with them



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Somebody contacted me recently about an article I wrote in January of this year – the one about how important it is to be aware of our thought processes and to practise dropping unhelpful, negative ones.

During our conversation, she mentioned that she tended to think quite negatively about an event that had happened over 20 years ago. And while at some level she knew it was futile going over old territory in her head, she really struggled with letting it go. She wondered was it really as simple as dropping the thought each time she was aware of it?

Well, yes and no. Yes, in so far as that so much of our thinking is purely a bad habit, and a largely unchecked habit at that. So when we decide to start keeping a check on our inner thought processes it can be a great way of developing awareness.

We can see how negative we often are for no good reason. However it's important to note that if something needs to be addressed but we keep ignoring it and decide "I'm not going there" then we run the risk of suppressing it.

We all know people who pretend to be happy when they're not, like they're holding a beachball under water as they go through life. This has

been one of the main criticisms of the "positive psychology" movement that came out of the US in the 1970s. Positive psychology holds the view that we must think positive thoughts and cultivate positive emotions and attitudes in order to be happy, healthy, and wise.

But such relentless pursuit of happiness and positivity can be a real pain! Isn't it tediously irksome when you're having a bit of a moan and some bright spark tries to put a positive spin on it? I'm not convinced that it's their positivity coming through, as much as their inability to tolerate and bear witness to someone else's pain.

FEELING EVEN WORSE

Relentless positivity can also add insult to injury: If people feel bad about life's many difficulties and they cannot manage to transcend their pain no matter how hard they try to be positive, they could end up feeling even worse. They could feel guilty or defective for not having the right (positive) attitude, in addition to whatever was ailing them in the first place. Then it becomes like a double whammy – feeling bad about feeling bad.

June Gruber, a researcher at Yale University, says: "It's not only that we have this obsessive pursuit of happiness, but we also have this obsessive avoidance of negative emotions. That creates an imbalance in our emotional ecosystem. We're not hardwired to just feel happy – we'd be neglecting a lot of important cues in our environment if we were feeling chronically happy all the time."

It's a bit ironic that America, birthplace of positive psychology and home of having a nice day, is where two-thirds of the world's antidepressants are consumed.

So with tongue firmly in cheek, I hope you're all having a really lousy day! **CL**

“I still get phantom pains, seven months down the line, but the doctor says this will go away with time. It's a sharp, pinching sensation that lasts about two seconds”

there. There's no real explanation about why I got shingles but my immune system must have been down," she says.

"Even still, the bridge of my nose is sore because I got such a bad blister there. It's like a bad sunburn feeling still at times. The painkillers were good, though I was afraid I'd end up addicted to them because I had to take so many. I felt extremely drained and tired from the whole thing.

"I didn't think shingles was from the same virus as chicken pox. I thought if you had chicken pox as a child you couldn't get anything as an adult but I know differently now." **CL**