

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

People often have negative thoughts about themselves and don't even realize it. They get so used to thinking in negative ways about themselves that they believe they are really bad. This makes it very hard to have confidence. It makes it difficult to keep trying. Changing negative thoughts to positive thoughts makes it much easier to lose weight and manage diabetes. Everyone feels bad at times, but it is not good to focus on blaming yourself. Here are some common negative thoughts that people in the lifestyle program often have about themselves:

- ▶ I'm a failure.
- ▶ I'm hopeless.
- ▶ I'm a quitter.
- ▶ I'm pathetic.

Failure Thoughts are when you say something about yourself based on one thing that happens. They make you doubt yourself.

- ▶ "I dropped the plate, so I'm clumsy."
- ▶ "I didn't lose weight this week, so I'm no good at eating smaller portions."
- ▶ "I didn't do well on the math test, so I'm a horrible student."

Failure thoughts like these make you feel bad. They make you doubt yourself. They make you doubt your ability to do things. They hurt your self-image. They are also not true. They are not true because they are generalizations. They make broad conclusions from one example. They don't take into account all the other times when things go well.

- ▶ Dropping a plate doesn't mean you are clumsy. It just means you had an accident.
- ▶ Not losing weight doesn't mean you're "no good" at eating smaller portions. It just means you made mistakes and need to figure out how to do better next time.
- ▶ Not doing well on a test doesn't mean you are a horrible student. Maybe you didn't prepare as well as you could have, or you just had a bad day.

KEY GOALS

Every week you continue to work on 4 key goals:

- ⊙ Limit RED foods
- ⊙ Increase GREEN activity
- ⊙ Hold Family Meetings
- ⊙ Keep Track of Weight

Can't Thoughts usually have the word "can't" in them. They make you feel helpless.

- ▶ "I can't avoid dropping things. It's hopeless."
- ▶ "I can't eat smaller portions. It's hopeless."
- ▶ "I can't pass that test. It's hopeless."

Of course, it really isn't hopeless. But if you feel hopeless, you may stop trying. That would make it hopeless.



Here's what you'll learn about in this module:

- ▶ Identifying your negative thoughts
- ▶ Challenging your negative thoughts
- ▶ Turning negative thoughts into positive thoughts



Always/Never Thoughts

are hopeless thoughts about yourself made stronger by using words like “always” or “never” to talk about failing. They make you feel like quitting.

Just like **Failure Thoughts**, an **Always/Never thought** is one that makes big generalizations from little evidence. It assumes that what happens once or a few times will “always” happen. Or that you will “never” succeed. And if it’s never going to work, you may as well quit.

- ▶ “I ate too many RED foods again. I’ll never be able to meet my goals. It’s over.”
- ▶ “I missed another shot. I’ll never be any good at basketball. I may as well quit.”
- ▶ “I missed my calorie goal again. I’ll always be overweight. Why keep trying?”

“Why me?” Thoughts are when you feel sorry for yourself because things aren’t going your way. Of course, it’s really hard to keep trying when you think it’s unfair that you have to



FAMILY MEETING

Tell your parents about some of the negative thoughts you have most often. Show them your lists of negative and positive thoughts. Ask them to point out any time you say negative things about yourself.

try in the first place. It’s seeing yourself as pathetic: “Why me? Poor me.”

- ▶ “Why should I have diabetes and have to lose weight? It just isn’t fair.”
- ▶ “It isn’t right that I should have to eat a healthy lunch at school when everyone else is eating burgers and fries and drinking soda.”
- ▶ “Why should I have to get physical activity every day? None of my friends do.”



Challenge your negative thoughts.

The more often you have negative thoughts about yourself, the harder it is to try. And the harder it is to try, the more likely you are not going to try. When you stop making the effort, the lie you told yourself about how hopeless you are comes true. If this goes on too long, you will soon have a very poor self-image. Who wants to think of herself as a failure? Who wants to think that nothing she tries will work out?

But, it doesn’t have to be this way. If you challenge your negative thinking, you can learn to see yourself in a more positive, hopeful—and realistic—way. Here’s how:

- ▶ *Turn your negative thought into a positive thought about yourself.*

CHALLENGE YOUR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS!



Remind yourself that a mistake isn’t the end of the world. Having a tough time learning new skills doesn’t mean you can’t. A mistake doesn’t mean you have to quit. For example, if you missed your RED food goal for the day, you could say to yourself, “I did everything right except for the RED food snack I had after school. I’ll just have to ask Mom not to have RED food snacks around. That way I won’t be tempted next time.”

Think of yourself as a winner because you keep trying. Think of yourself as hopeful because you believe in yourself. Think of yourself as a “can-do” person because you look for solutions. Think of yourself as someone who meets challenges, not as someone who complains about them.

- ▶ *Make your thought neutral if you can’t make it positive.* For example, if you do drop something, just say, “It was an accident. Accidents happen to all of us.”
- ▶ *Pretend you’re a friend.* Next time you find yourself thinking negative thoughts, say to yourself what you

Pretend you're a friend. Say to yourself what you would say to a good friend who did what you did.

would say to a good friend who did the same thing. Would you say, "You're such a loser. You can never pass up a RED food snack. No wonder you weigh so much?" No. You'd never say this to your friend. It would be cruel and just not true. So don't say it to yourself.

What would you say to your friend? Probably something like this: "Sure, it's tough to pass up RED food snacks when everyone else is eating them. But that doesn't make you a failure. It doesn't mean you can't ever succeed. It just means you need to make a better plan to deal with the situation. You need to problem-solve. You can find ways to avoid the situation altogether or to deal with it in a way that gives you a better chance of success. I'd like to help you with that."

This response would be a lot more positive and make you feel a lot better about yourself.

► *Pretend you're an adult you trust.* When you find that you are thinking negative thoughts about yourself, try saying to yourself what you think your parent, a

At her family meeting, Alicia reported that she had eaten too many RED foods at a party. Then she added, "If I weren't so stupid, I wouldn't have done that!"

Alicia's mother pointed out that this was negative thinking. She asked if Alicia had other negative thoughts about herself. Alicia answered, "Sure, I have some negative thoughts about myself. I do a lot of stupid things."

When her mother asked for some examples, Alicia said she forgot to take her history book to school that day, ate too many RED foods at the party, and didn't meet her physical activity goals because it had rained for the past two days.

"Forgetting your book was an accident. Lots of times people forget things when they rush. It doesn't mean you are stupid. It just means you need to load your backpack for school the night before," Alicia's mother said.

Then she explained about negative thinking. She encouraged Alicia to try thinking about herself in a more positive—and realistic—way. She asked Alicia if she could tell her some positive thoughts about the other two examples she had given.

Alicia said she knew that missing her physical activity didn't really prove she was stupid. It just meant that she hadn't taken the time to listen to the weather report and plan how to get some physical activity inside if it rained. "I know I don't always eat too many RED foods. I guess I should think about how I can do better next time," she said.

Until then, Alicia hadn't been aware of how negative and unrealistic some of her thoughts were. She made a plan to look more closely at her thoughts. She wanted to see if she was doing a lot of negative thinking about herself. She planned to write down her negative thoughts. Then she would write down a more positive way of looking at herself in the same situation.

"That's a great idea," her mother said. "I'll ask you about it at the family meeting this week. I'm sure you'll find some more helpful ways to think about yourself."

How could Alicia think more positively?

How long do you think it will take Alicia to learn to think more positively? Why?

grandparent or someone who really cares about you would say. That will probably be very positive.

attention to negative thoughts about limiting RED foods and increasing GREEN activity. Changing these thoughts will help you meet your goals.

KEY QUESTION

What negative thoughts hurt me most?

Everyone is different. Everybody's negative thoughts are a little different. You don't want to keep holding yourself back by attacking yourself. That's why you need to *get to know your negative thoughts*. This is the first step to turning them around.

Start a list of your negative thoughts. Add to it whenever you have a negative thought. How do you think about yourself when you make a mistake? How do you think about your weight? Pay special

SPECIAL FOCUS

How can I learn to think more positively about myself?

- ▶ After making a list of your negative thoughts, write down some positive ways you could talk to yourself in each situation. When a negative thought springs up, say to yourself, "I know better than that. I'm not going to see myself as a failure. I'm not hopeless. I *am* going to use my skills to solve the problem." Practice is important. You have to remind yourself to notice negative thoughts and to replace them with positive thoughts.
- ▶ Carry your list of positive thoughts around with you. Look it over when you need a reminder. This will help you start to feel better about yourself. You will

What are your negative thoughts? Knowing what they are is the first step to turning them around.

feel more sure of yourself. It will take longer than a week to change your habits of thinking negative thoughts about yourself, but once you do, you will feel much better about yourself.

- ▶ Consider using social support to help you defeat your negative thoughts. Talk to two friends about a situation in which you think negatively about yourself. Ask them to encourage you to be positive next time you are in that situation. This will help you be more positive about yourself.

A mistake isn't the end of the world. It's just a sign that you may need to make some changes.

Notes to myself—some things I want to keep in mind this week:

Skills and Goals for turning negative thoughts into positive thoughts

- ▶ Identify situations when my thinking is negative
- ▶ Identify positive thoughts I could have instead
- ▶ Practice turning my negative thinking into positive thinking

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

Ways to Turn Negative Thoughts into Positive Thoughts

Negative thoughts are unhelpful. Positive thoughts help to keep you focused on healthy behaviors. Here are some examples of ways to turn negative thoughts about yourself into positive thoughts.

Situation	Negative Thought	Positive Thought
My activity level: I did not get GREEN physical activity for two days in a row.	"I'm so stupid. Why did I watch so much television instead of getting some fresh air and physical activity?"	"Everyone makes mistakes. Rather than watch more television now, I will go for a run around the park."
My self-control: I ate more than 25 RED foods this week.	"It's all over now. I am such a failure. I wish I could control myself. Now I am really going to gain weight."	"I can't be perfect every week. I know that I can eat fewer RED foods this week by just being a little more careful about what I eat at lunch and snacks."
My ability to manage my weight: Instead of losing, I gained a pound this week.	"I am going to gain back all the weight that I lost now. I'll never be able to take care of my diabetes by losing weight and being healthy. I'm just so bad at this."	"I know that I slipped a little bit. But I know that this is just a slip-up and that I should get back on track right away. I'll just do a better job of keeping track of what I eat when I eat it."

Challenging My Negative Thoughts

Use this chart to help yourself identify and challenge your negative thinking. First, write down situations that challenge or frustrate you in the column on the left. In the next column, write down the negative thoughts you have about the situation. In the column on the right, write down the positive thoughts you can have about yourself and how you could handle each situation.

Situation	Negative Thought	Positive Thought
Limiting RED Foods:		
Increasing GREEN Activity:		
My appearance:		
My body shape:		
My ability to manage my weight:		
My self-control:		
My health:		
My ability to make friends:		

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

Using Support to Challenge Negative Thoughts

Use this chart to identify friends who could help you challenge your negative thinking.

First, write down situations that challenge or frustrate you.

In the second column, write down the negative thoughts you often have about this situation.

Next, write down the name of a friend or family member who may be able to help you challenge your negative thinking.

Finally, write down what your friend or family member can do or say to help you think more positively.

Situation	Negative Thought	Friend or Family Member	What my friend/family member can do or say to help me think positively.
My activity level: I did not get GREEN physical activity for two days in a row.	"I'm so stupid. Why did I watch so much television instead of getting some fresh air and physical activity?"	Shania	My friend Shania could remind me that I did a good job last week. She could encourage me to get back on track this week. She could go with me on a walk in the park to meet my physical activity goal today.

Types of Negative Thoughts

Draw a line to match each type of negative thought with an example.

Failure Thought

"I *can't* eat smaller portions. It's hopeless."

Can't Thought

"*Why* should I have to get physical activity every day? My friends don't."

Always/Never Thought

"I didn't lose weight this week, so I must be no good at eating smaller portions."

"Why me?" Thought

"I missed my calorie goal again. I'll *always* be overweight. Why try?"

Overcoming Negative Thoughts

Common negative thoughts that people often have about themselves:

- ▶ **Failure Thoughts** are based on one thing that goes wrong. They make you doubt yourself. *"I dropped the plate. I must be clumsy."*
- ▶ **Can't Thoughts** use the word "can't." They make you feel helpless. *"I can't eat smaller portions. It's hopeless."*
- ▶ **Always/Never Thoughts** use words like "always" or "never" to talk about failing. They make you feel like trying is useless. *"I ate too many RED foods again. I'll never meet my goals."*
- ▶ **"Why me?" Thoughts** make you feel sorry for yourself and not want to try. *"Why should I have diabetes? It's not fair."*



Challenge your negative thoughts.

- ▶ Turn your negative thought into a positive thought. Tell yourself that you're a winner because you don't quit.
- ▶ Make a thought neutral if you can't make it positive. If you drop something, just say, *"It's an accident. Accidents happen to all of us."*
- ▶ Say to yourself what you would tell a friend who did what you did.
- ▶ Say to yourself what your parent, grandparent, or an adult you trust would say.

SPECIAL FOCUS

How you can learn to think more positively.

- ▶ Write down your negative thoughts about limiting RED foods and increasing GREEN activity.
- ▶ Make a list of positive thoughts you could think about instead. Write them down.
- ▶ Make positive thinking a habit. Use your list of positive thoughts. Carry it around.
- ▶ Talk to 2 friends about a situation when you think negatively about yourself. Ask them to encourage you to be positive next time it happens.