



Taming Unhelpful Thoughts

Thought distortions are unhealthy ways of thinking that convince us of negative things that aren't true. These thought patterns can cause us stress, lower self-esteem, lead to unhealthy behaviors, and derail us from reaching our health goals. Here are a few common types of distorted thoughts.



All or nothing thinking

Seeing things in only two categories
"If I can't follow the plan perfectly, I have failed."



Mind reading

Imagining we know that others are thinking.
"People will think I'm strange if I choose the salad instead of the fries"



Unhelpful rules

Following unrealistic rules can lead to feeling guilty and frustrated.
"I should be losing more weight"



Disqualifying the positive

Discounting the good things that happened.
"It was just one night of good sleep"



Labeling

Simplifying something to a single characteristic
"Carbs are bad for my health"



Exaggerated thinking

Making something much bigger or smaller than it is.
"I had a donut, so my day is ruined"

Ways to overcome thought distortions

We all experience thought distortions, but we can learn to stop the negative thoughts. Which types did you identify with most?

The first step in overcoming these thought distortions is identifying them. The second is to practice more balanced thinking. Here are some steps to create more balanced thoughts:

- Challenge the thought. What is the evidence for and against the thought?
- Think of other ways to view the situation.
- Think of how you would respond to someone else in the same situation.
- Notice charged and extreme words (like terrible, always, never) and replace them with less extreme, more realistic words (like disappointing, frustrating, well-done, sometimes).

For example:

Distorted thought: I always mess up and make poor food choices.	Balanced thought: I sometimes have lapses, but I also have many success. Each mistake is a learning opportunity.
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