

Negative Self-Talk

Listed below are some examples of common negative thoughts related to food, eating, exercise, and weight. Think about which thought patterns you've had in the past and whether or not these thought patterns have had a positive (or negative) impact on your nutrition, fitness, and health goals.

Black or White Thinking (You're either perfect or a total failure.)

- I can eat only foods with zero grams of fat. I can't eat foods with any fat in them!
- Carbohydrates are "bad." I'm never eating bread, potatoes, tortillas, or pasta again!
- I shouldn't have eaten that cookie. Now, I'm off my diet. I might as well eat the whole box and start over again tomorrow!
- I don't have time to exercise for an entire hour, so I might as well do nothing at all!
- I was "good" all last week. But yesterday, I blew it and had a piece of cake for dessert. I'm a loser! I can't do anything right!

Catastrophic Thinking (Exaggerating the significance of one single event.)

- I tried so hard this week, but I still didn't lose a pound. That's it! I give up. I'm never going to lose weight!
- I ate half a bag of chips today. It's hopeless! I'm always going to be an overeater. I'll be fat and alone forever!
- I can't believe I ate an extra serving of carbs at dinner tonight. Now, I'm going to gain weight!
- I didn't work-out at all today. I'm going to get so fat!
- I'm a pound heavier today; my whole day is ruined!

Pessimistic Thinking (Seeing only the negatives and assuming the worst.)

- All the food on campus is greasy and fattening!
- All healthy foods taste terrible!
- When I look in the mirror, all I can see is my fat thighs!
- It's impossible to control portion sizes at restaurants!
- If I cook low-fat meals, my boyfriend (or girlfriend) will complain!

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

- If I get stressed out, I know I'll binge.
- If I eat too much, I have to do something to get rid of it.
- If I eat one serving of ice cream, I know I won't be able to stop.
- When I go on vacation, there's no way I'll be able to exercise.
- When I go home for the holidays, I know I'll eat everything in sight.

Should Statements (Being ruled by a rigid set of rules.)

- I need to eat only salad for lunch or else I'll gain weight.
- I should never eat fast food if I want to be healthy.
- I must exercise every day or else I'll have to really restrict my diet.
- I shouldn't eat after 6:00 p.m. or else all the calories will turn to fat.
- I must never eat dessert if I want to stay thin.

"It's-not-my-fault" Thinking (Shifting responsibility for your behaviors.)

- If it weren't for my roommates, I wouldn't have the sweets around my apartment.
- I've had a rough day; I deserve a treat.
- I would eat healthier if the food on campus weren't so greasy.
- I would exercise if I had more time.
- I would eat more if food didn't upset my stomach so much.

Mind Reading (Assuming people are thinking the worst about you.)

- If I ask for "no oil," people will make fun of my efforts to lose weight.
- If I go to the gym, people will stare and laugh at my body.
- If people see me eating dessert, they will think I'm not healthy.

Discounting (Can't accept positive feedback.)

- Whenever people say I look great, I sarcastically respond, "Yeah, right!"
- Whenever someone compliments my performance, I insist that I could have done better.

Comparing (Always comparing self to others.)

- That girl is thinner than me. I've got to lose weight!
- That guy is more cut than I am. I've got to work out harder in the gym!

Negative Self-Talk

Changing Your Mind

Positive (or negative) self-talk can be very powerful. If you go into an exam thinking “I can do this. I’m totally prepared. I’m going to ace this thing!” you’re far more likely to be successful than if you go in worrying “I’m not ready for this. I’m going to fail!” In addition to affecting your academic performance, self-talk influences your athletic performance, your ability to overcome personal crises, and your eating and physical activity behaviors.

Some tips:

1. Listen to your thoughts.
2. Decide if your thoughts help or hurt your progress.
3. STOP your negative thoughts.
4. Re-word your negative thoughts to make them into positive messages. Check out the guidelines and examples below:

Consider these guidelines...

- Think about successful changes you’ve already made. Imagine good results with changes you plan on making.
- Say what you are doing now. Use the present tense.
- Make it as positive as you can. Be specific.
- Forget what should be.
- Make it personal with special meaning to you. Contradict an old negative message you’ve been saying far too long.

Examples:

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts
Examples:	
I can’t eat any chocolate! It’s so fattening!	I can have a couple of pieces of chocolate when I feel like having some. We all need some fat in our diet. Eating some fat doesn’t mean I will become fat.
I didn’t lose a pound this week. I’m never going to lose weight.	Weight loss may be slow, but this time it will stay off.
I ate half a bag of chips. It’s hopeless; I’m always going to be an overeater.	I usually polish off a whole bag of chips at one time. I’m really beginning to make progress.
I must exercise every day or I’ll never lose weight and be healthy.	Rest is also important for health. If I exercise too much, I could get injured and ultimately exercise less often.
I’m a pound heavier today. My day is ruined!	It’s normal for weight to fluctuate one or two pounds a day due to fluid shifts. It doesn’t mean I’ve gained a pound of fat.
I would eat healthier if the food in the dining halls weren’t so greasy.	There are several low fat choices in the dining halls. I can make turkey sandwiches for lunch, and the salad bar is stocked with lots of healthy vegetables and even low calorie dressings.
If I eat too much, I have to do something to get rid of it or else I’ll get fat!	It’s normal to sometimes eat more than I really need. But, it takes days of overeating to gain weight. I’ll just go back to my normal eating and exercise routine and everything will be fine.
If I ask for “no oil,” people will make fun of my efforts to lose weight.	Lots of people make low fat requests at restaurants, especially in L.A. No one will think anything of it.
That girl is thinner than me. I’ve got to lose weight!	I work-out regularly and have a lean, muscular body. Weight doesn’t say anything about body composition, health, or beauty. I’m the best I can be.

5. Repeat it many times a day. (i.e. While you brush your teeth, as you wait in the lunch line, while sitting in class, just before you go to sleep at night).
6. Write, print, or type them on a piece of paper. Post them on a mirror, on your notebook, on your car dashboard--any place you’ll see it often.