

# Negative Self-Talk

Listed below are some examples of common negative thoughts related to eating, exercise and weight. Think about which of these thought patterns you've had and whether these thought patterns have had a positive or negative impact on your weight and health goals.

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

- Carbohydrates are "bad." I'm never eating bread, potatoes or pasta again.
- I shouldn't have eaten that biscuit. Now that I'm off my diet I might as well eat the whole packet and start 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 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. I give up. I'm never going to lose weight.
- I can't believe I ate dessert at dinner tonight. Now, I'm going to gain weight.
- I didn't exercise at all today. I'm going to gain weight.

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

- All healthy foods taste terrible.
- It's impossible to control portion sizes at restaurants.
- If I cook low-fat meals, my kids will complain.

## Self-fulfilling Prophecy

- If I get stressed out, I know I'll binge.
- If I eat one chocolate, I know I won't be able to stop.
- When I go on holiday, there's no way I'll be able to exercise.
- When I go home after work, I know I'll eat everything in sight.

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

- I should never eat fast food if I want to be healthy.
- I should exercise every day or else I'll have to really restrict my diet.
- I should never eat dessert if I want to stay thin.

## **“It’s-not-my-fault” Thinking (Shifting responsibility for your behaviours.)**

- If it weren’t for my partner, I wouldn’t have the sweets around the house then I wouldn’t eat them.
- I’ve had a bad day; I deserve a treat.
- I would exercise if I had more time.
- My colleagues always bring cakes into the office, it’s impossible not to eat them.

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

- If I ask for small portions, 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 trying.

## **Discounting (Can’t accept positive feedback.)**

- Whenever people say I look great, I sarcastically think, “Yeah, right.”
- Whenever someone compliments my performance, I insist that I could have done better.

## **Comparing (Always comparing self to others.)**

- That woman is thinner than me. I’ve got to lose weight.
- That man has lost more weight than me. What’s wrong with me?

## **Changing Your Mind**

Positive or negative self-talk can be very powerful. If you go into an examination thinking “I can do this. I’m fully 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 exercise performance, your ability to overcome personal crises and your eating and physical activity behaviours.

## **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 examples below.
5. Repeat them many times a day (i.e., while you brush your teeth, as you wait in traffic etc.).
6. Write them on a piece of paper. Put them on a mirror, on your notebook, on your car dashboard - any place where you’ll see them often.

## Examples

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts
Carbohydrates are “bad.” I’m never eating bread, potatoes or pasta again.	No foods are good or bad. Everybody needs carbohydrates for nutrients and energy. Eating some “carbs” doesn’t mean I will gain weight.
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 shouldn’t have eaten that biscuit . Now that I’m off my diet I might as well eat the whole packet and start again tomorrow	I usually polish off a whole packet of biscuits at one time. I’m really beginning to make progress.
I would exercise if I had more time.	I’m busy this week so I will get up 10 minutes earlier to help me to fit some physical activity into my day.
I’ve had a bad day; I deserve a treat.	I made it through a tough day of work and stuck to my goals for eating healthy snacks. I can do it.
If I ask for small portions people will make fun of my efforts to lose weight.	Lots of people ask for small portions at restaurants. No one will think anything of it.
If I go to the gym, people will stare and laugh at my body.	Everybody is busy with their own exercises at the gym. Nobody will notice what I am doing.

## Joe’s Experience

Joe got into the cycle of negative thinking - he made excuses and felt like giving up. Joe was always busy and stressed at work and didn’t think he had time to eat healthily. “This diet is too hard; I have no willpower.”

Sticking to a healthy eating plan and being busy are challenging but losing weight and being healthy was very important to Joe. Problem-solving, positive thinking and stress management could help Joe handle a busy day differently.

## Joe’s Improved Day

Joe packed lunch the night before. When his boss was critical, Joe took a 10-minute break to calm down. After his break, Joe was able to think more positively: “I am a good worker. I know that I’m doing my best, so I will not take my boss’s comments too personally.” When Joe came home, he was tired and ready for a snack but not upset. He went to the kitchen and saw a bowl of fruit on the counter, so he ate an apple. Joe thought: “I made it through a tough day of work and stuck to my goals for eating healthy snacks. I can do it!” Joe rewarded himself by taking a relaxing hot bath.

Think about how YOU can turn negative thoughts into positive thoughts and change your day.

## Useful sources of information

NHS Moodzone Audios and Mental Health Apps

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/moodzone-mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>

Get Self Help

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

Choose from top menu: Click the top link Self-Help or Downloads for list of topics

Books on Prescription: These are self-help books that are available at local libraries

<https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription>

MIND.org.uk

Information and Support -> A-Z Mental Health

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/local-minds/> - Find Your Local MIND

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about this leaflet, please contact the Weight Management Dietitians on 020 8725 1022 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm). Out of hours, please contact the above number and leave a voicemail.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

## AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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