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# Depression: Stop Negative Thoughts

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3 MIN READ

Depression is a mental health condition that causes you to feel sad, lose interest in activities that you used to enjoy, withdraw from others, and have little energy. It's different from normal feelings of sadness, grief, or low energy. It can also cause people to feel hopeless about the future and to even think about suicide. If you think you may be depressed, tell your doctor. Treatment can help you enjoy life.

## Negative thoughts

When you have depression, negative thoughts can increase your feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Changing these negative thought patterns may not be easy. But our minds can be trained to be stronger and healthier—just like a muscle. A technique called thought reframing can help.

Thought reframing is the process of replacing negative thoughts with more helpful thoughts. It's a skill taught in a type of counseling called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). There are also books and apps that can help you learn thought reframing on your own.

With practice, you can get better at choosing healthier thoughts to replace negative thoughts.

## How can you use thought reframing when you have depression?

Negative thoughts can increase your feelings of sadness or hopelessness. With some practice, you can learn to shift those thoughts into healthier ways of thinking. Here are some tips to get started.

- Be on the lookout for common types of discouraging thoughts. When you know the common types, it's easier to spot them when they happen. Here are a few to watch out for.
  - **Ignoring the positive.** This means that you filter out the good and focus only on the bad. For example, even though you have some friends, you might say, "I don't have many friends, so people must not like me."
  - **The "should."** Thinking that you or other people "should" or "must" do something is a sign of this type of thinking. For example, "I should get these seven things done today."
  - **Overgeneralizing.** This means taking one example and saying it's true for everything. Watch for words such as "never" and "always." For example, "My last relationship didn't end well. I'll never find the right person."

- **All-or-nothing thinking.** This is also called black-or-white thinking. It means that you think of things as either all good or all bad—with no options in between. For example, "If my job review isn't perfect, I'll get fired."
- **Assuming the worst.** For example, "I have a headache. What if it's a brain tumor?"
- Practice reframing your thoughts.
  - **Notice the negative thought.** Don't be hard on yourself because you had the thought. Negative thoughts can pop up sometimes before you can stop them. But learning to recognize them can help you shift them.
  - **Question the thought.** Ask yourself whether it's helpful or true. Your answers can help you find more accurate ways to think about the situation.
  - **Replace the thought.** Ask yourself "What's something that's true and more helpful?" Use your answer to replace the discouraging thought. Here's an example:
    - You might first think: "I must get so many things done today."
    - You can replace that thought with: "I could do one of these things today. Which one could I do quickly, so I can check it off my list? Or which one is the most important to do today?"
- Use a thought diary.
  - Write down negative thoughts throughout the day. Then rewrite them to be more encouraging. Over time, choosing more positive thoughts in the moment will get easier.

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