

Depression: Stop Negative Thoughts

Depression is an illness that makes a person feel sad or hopeless much of the time. It's different from feeling a little sad or down. Depression can be treated with counseling or medicine, or both.

Healthy thinking also can help prevent or control depression.

- If you have thoughts of harming yourself or others, you need to see your doctor or therapist right away. Healthy thinking can help with depression. But you may also need medicine and therapy.
- Negative thoughts can make depression worse or can be a symptom of depression.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy, or CBT, is a type of therapy that can help you replace negative thoughts with accurate, encouraging ones.
- Changing your thinking will take some time. You need to practice healthy thinking every day. After a while, healthy thinking will come naturally to you.

How can you use healthy thinking to cope with depression?

Notice and stop your thoughts

The first step is to notice and stop your negative thoughts or "self-talk." Self-talk is what you think and believe about yourself and your experiences. It's like a running commentary in your head. Your self-talk may be rational and helpful. Or it may be negative and not helpful.

Ask about your thoughts

The next step is to ask yourself whether your thoughts are helpful or unhelpful. Does the evidence support your negative thought? Some of your self-talk may be true. Or it may be partly true but exaggerated. There are several kinds of irrational thoughts. Here are a few types to look for:

- **Focusing on the negative:** This is sometimes called filtering. You filter out the good and focus only on the bad. Example: "I'm sad that I don't have many friends. People must not like me." Reality: You have some friends. So that means you're likable and can make more friends if you want them.
- **Should:** People sometimes have set ideas about how they "should" act. If you hear yourself saying that you or other people "should," "ought to," or "have to" do something, then you might be setting yourself up to feel bad. Example: "I should get married before I'm 30. If I don't, it means I'm a loser." Reality: There's nothing wrong with having a time line in mind. But you're not being fair to yourself if you make your self-worth depend on meeting a deadline.
- **Overgeneralizing:** This is taking one example and saying it's true for everything. Look for words such as "never" and "always." Example: "I got laid off. I'll never get another job." Reality: Many people lose their jobs because of downsizing and other things beyond their control. It doesn't mean that you won't be able to get another job.
- **All-or-nothing thinking:** This is also called black-or-white thinking. Example: "If I don't get a big raise at my next review, then it means I have no future with this company." Reality: There's nothing wrong with wanting a big raise. But if you don't get the raise, there may be reasons for it that have nothing to do with you.

Choose your thoughts

The next step is to choose a more helpful thought to replace the unhelpful one.

Keeping a journal of your thoughts is one of the best ways to practice stopping, asking, and choosing your thoughts. It makes you aware of your self-talk. Write down any negative or unhelpful thoughts you had during the day. If you think you might not remember at the end of your day, keep a notepad with you so you can write down any irrational thoughts as they happen. Then write down a helpful message to correct the unhelpful thought.

If you do this every day, accurate and helpful thoughts will soon come naturally to you. But there may be some truth in some of your negative thoughts. You may have some things you want to work on. If you didn't perform as well as you would like on something, write that down. You can work on a plan to correct or improve that area.

If you want, you also could write down what kind of irrational thought you had. Journal entries might look something like this:

Thought diary

Stop your negative thought	Ask what type of negative thought you had	Choose an accurate, helpful thought
"I'm sad that I don't have many friends. People must not like me."	Focusing on negative	"I have some friends, so I know I can make friends."
"I should get married before I'm 30. If I don't, it means I'm a loser."	Should	"There's no guarantee that I'll meet the right person by the time I'm 30. If I don't get married by then, I still have time to find a good relationship."
"I got laid off. I'll never get another job."	Overgeneralizing	"Our company ran into financial trouble, so I got laid off. It may take some time to get another job, but I know I will."
"If I don't get a big raise at my next review, then it means I have no future with this company."	All or nothing	"I would love to get a big raise. But it might not be in the company's budget this year."

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)