

# Dealing With Negative Thoughts

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### Topic Overview



### What exactly is a negative thought?

Suppose a coworker or a grocery store clerk suddenly gave you a mean look. How would you react? Would you just let it slide off you, like water off a duck? Or would you take it personally and feel bad about yourself, or even get angry about it? If you turn small things into big things that bother you for days, weeks, or even longer, you're having negative thoughts.

Negative thoughts can make you feel sad and anxious. They take the joy out of life-and they can take a toll on your physical health. That's why it's so important to learn how to deal with them.

### How can you deal with negative thoughts?

One way to deal with negative thoughts is to replace them with thoughts that make you feel better. Let's say you just learned that you have a health problem. You might tell yourself "My life will never be the way it used to be" or "This is the beginning of the end for me." That will probably make you feel pretty bad-and it will make your body weaker, just when you need it to be strong.

Or you could tell yourself something like "This is going to be a challenge for a while, but if I'm patient I can learn to adapt and still enjoy my life" or "This is a setback for me, but I

can recover from it if I give myself time." This kind of thought can make you feel better and more hopeful. And it helps your body too.

Do you have any negative thoughts right now? (Sometimes it's hard to even know.) Take a minute, listen to your thoughts, and see if you do. If you're telling yourself something that makes you feel bad, remember: You are in charge of what you tell yourself. So why not come up with something more encouraging?

## **They're "just thoughts." What's the big deal?**

Because of the mind-body connection, your thoughts really can affect your health. By telling yourself more encouraging things, you're telling your brain to produce chemicals that can:

- Lower your blood pressure.
- Reduce your risk for heart disease.
- Make your immune system stronger so you can resist infection and disease.
- Lower your stress level and make you feel less anxious.
- Help you avoid stomach problems, insomnia, and back pain.
- Make you feel happier and more optimistic about the future.

## **What else can you do to feel more positive?**

Sometimes negative thoughts are connected to the way you live from day to day. Here are some things you can try right now to help you see the brighter side of life:

- **Focus on what you are feeling right now.** If you're sad, feel the sadness. But don't tell yourself that you have always felt this way and are doomed to feel sad forever. Sadness passes. A negative thought can linger... until you let it go.
- **Share your feelings with someone close to you.** Everyone has negative thoughts from time to time. Talking about it with someone else helps you keep those thoughts in perspective.
- **Do something nice for yourself.** Maybe you could work less today and play with your kids more. Or you could find something that makes you laugh.
- **Take time to count your blessings.** There are so many things for each of us to be thankful for. What's one thing you appreciate?
- **Eat well. Sleep well. Be active.** The nicer you are to your body, the easier it is to feel more positive about yourself.
- **Make social connections.** This is just a fancy way of saying "create the kind of community you want." Enjoy some time with family and friends. Find a faith community that works for you. Join a team or club. Take up a new hobby.

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## **Related Information**

- Building Resilience

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## **References**

### **Other Works Consulted**

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## Credits for Dealing With Negative Thoughts

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