



An important part of managing your depression is managing your thought patterns. Seeing oneself as a hopeless or bad person, feeling responsible whenever something goes wrong, or dwelling on worst-case scenarios are all examples of exaggerated, negative thought patterns. This kind of distorted thinking can spiral downward until you're unable to see or imagine anything positive. You can minimize the impact of negative thoughts by practicing specific strategies for thinking more constructively.

Acknowledge your thoughts

To avoid giving in to negative thinking, learn to identify your thoughts as they occur to you. Say them out loud or write them down. The goal here is not to try and eliminate them, but simply to see them for what they are - just thoughts.

Challenge your thoughts

When you identify a negative thought that occurs to you frequently, argue with it. Challenge the accuracy of your thoughts. For example, when thoughts such as "I am worthless" arise, counter them with more realistic thoughts such as "My kids need me" or "My employer values my work." Each time you counter exaggerated statements ("Everything I do is wrong") with facts ("I walked the dog today," "My boss complimented me on my report"), your negative thoughts lose more of their power.

Interrupt your thoughts

Again, use your imagination to create a device to help you stop your negative thoughts as soon as you recognize them. Some people visualize a stoplight or stop sign, or imagine hearing a buzzer or alarm.

Walk away from your thoughts

Sometimes the best approach is to change the subject or create a diversion or distraction. Take a walk, call a friend, read a magazine, or tackle a chore. Whatever provides respite for you - even temporarily - will allow your brain to break the cycle of negative thinking.

U-M Depression Center ■ 800-475-6424 ■ www.depressioncenter.org

Please visit the UMDC online toolkit at www.depressiontoolkit.org. This toolkit was made possible by the Friends of the University of Michigan Hospital and Health System.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

©2011 The Regents of the University of Michigan