

SELF-TALK

Self-talk is what we habitually say to ourselves without realizing it. Evidence suggests that positive self-talk can be a powerful tool to increase self-confidence, motivation and productivity, while limiting negative emotions.

FAULTY THINKING

About half of people who live with pain also experience depression. Depression, anxiety and pain change our thinking from when we are happy or content. This can result in faulty thinking and errors in evaluating information.

CATASTROPHIC THINKING

“I hurt a lot. I will never get better. This pain is uncontrollable and unbearable. There is nothing I can do but lie still and take more medication. I am totally useless.”

- Catastrophic thinking is the tendency to think of worst-case scenarios, often misinterpreting an event as a catastrophe even if it is not.
- Over time as it becomes easier to make incorrect assumptions, we can develop unrealistic expectations and beliefs about ourselves.
- Catastrophic thinking can lead to negative emotional states, worsening anxiety, anger and depression (a cycle of distress), making it more challenging to replace ineffective beliefs with realistic and effective ones.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

If you find yourself experiencing negative self-talk or catastrophic thinking, take a few minutes to assess your thoughts. Examples of questions you can ask yourself include:

- Is there any real truth to my thought?
- Is there evidence that suggests the opposite of my thought might actually be true?
- If I tried to reframe the situation more positively, what would it look like?
- Will this really matter a year from now? What will I think about this five years from now?

MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

Overwhelming thoughts can often be counterproductive. Mindfulness exercises can help bring awareness to the tension in your mind and body and reduce negative thoughts.

Mindfulness exercises can enable you to approach negative thoughts with curiosity and build an understanding of why such thoughts arise and how they can be addressed.

Some examples of mindfulness exercises that bring focus on the breath and body include:

- **Breathing meditation (focusing on the breath):** Sit in a comfortable position, take a deep inhale to the count of four, hold each breath to the count of four, and slowly exhale to the count of four. Notice the tension release from your body.
- **Body scanning:** Lie down or sit in a comfortable position, bring your focus on each aspect of the body from head to toe, and release any tension built up in any area.
- **Grounding:** Lie down or sit in a comfortable position, bring the focus to your body with each breath and allow your thoughts to come and go freely.
- **Walking meditation:** Stand still and allow the body to make a movement on its own. Once the movement begins, notice the sensations in your feet as you place them on the ground with each step.

During these mindfulness exercises, it is important to have compassion for yourself. Allow your thoughts to wander without judgement and, each time they do, allow yourself to slowly come back and refocus on your body and breath.

RESOURCES FOR SELF-TALK

- [Helpful thinking](#)
- [The power of language in chronic pain self-management](#)
- [Positive self-talk: How talking to yourself is a good thing](#)