

## UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES/SABOTAGING THOUGHTS

Changing your body and improving your health requires mental skills that help you stay focused and motivated to achieve your weight loss and fitness goals. You need to learn to identify emotional triggers around food and how to cope with cravings.

CBT examines your eating patterns and the thoughts associated with food to change unhealthy behaviour and help you lose unwanted weight. Most unhelpful eating choices come out of emotions and habits and learning to understand how your thoughts are connected to your behaviour and emotions will help you achieve your weight loss and healthy lifestyle goals.

Changing long term habitual behaviours depends largely on how you manage your thoughts and CBT provides you with the tools to do that.

*Sabotaging thoughts undermine your healthy eating and fitness plans in the following ways:*

1. They encourage you to eat - those are the permission giving thoughts.  
I know I shouldn't eat this, but I am really tired, and I deserve a bit of chocolate.  
I had a hard/stressful day, so it's ok to have a glass of wine/beer  
I really want it.
2. Undermine your confidence - usually happens when you eat something that is not on plan.  
I have eaten cake, now I am never going to lose all that weight.  
I'm so weak; I'm useless at this!
3. They make you disregard everything that you know about losing weight  
I don't need to write goals down, they are in my head  
It's ok not to prepare food in advance I am too busy today  
I don't like drinking at least 2 liters of water a day
4. They increase your general level of stress.  
I need to do this perfectly all the time.  
I have to keep everyone happy.  
I can't say no to.....  
I must go to the gym every day otherwise I won't lose weight.

## THOUGHTS – FEELINGS-BEHAVIOUR CIRCLE

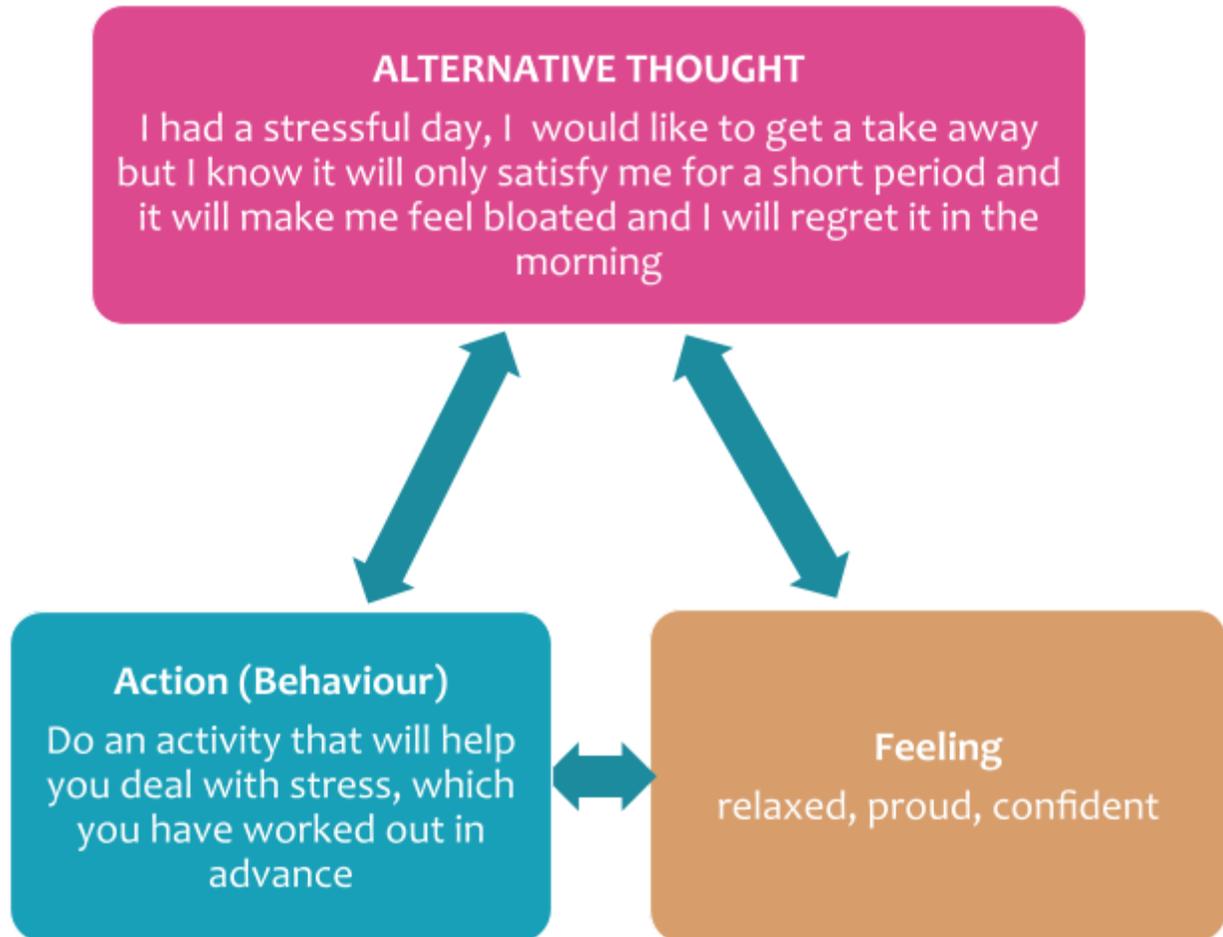
**TRIGGER/SITUATION:** Coming home from work in the evening.

**NOTICE HOW YOUR THOUGHTS-FEELINGS-ACTION ARE ALL CONNECTED**



## ALTERNATIVE / HELPFUL THOUGHTS

**IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE YOUR ACTION/BEHAVIOUR, YOU HAVE TO CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS**



**TRIGGER/SITUATION:** Coming home from work in the evening

**AS YOU CAN SEE, THE THOUGHT CHANGES AND AS A RESULT THE ACTION AND FEELING ALSO CHANGED.**

**THIS IS HOW WE FUNCTION AS HUMAN BEINGS.**



**There are many types of unhelpful thinking styles.**

**Following below are the most important ones relevant to achieving a healthy lifestyle and weight loss.**

### 1. All or Nothing (Black & White) Thinking

Thinking only in Black & White or All or Nothing is unhelpful, as it won't allow you to have a balanced view. Not many things in life are black or white and in order to have balance, thinking in shades of grey will allow you to be satisfied with being 'good enough' and accepting it is ok not to perform at your very best all of the time.

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
I have to lose all of my extra weight; there is no point in aiming to lose only some of it.	I will aim to lose 10% of my body weight to begin with, this will motivate me to set new goals.
What's the point of walking for 10 minutes – I have to work out at least 1 hour for it to count.	One hour in the gym would be great, but today I only have time for a quick walk. It still counts as exercise and the fresh air will help blow away some cobwebs.

### 2. Mental Filter/Disqualifying the positive

You are only noticing the negative things around you. You are filtering out the positive things. Are you seeing everything through "gloomy specs"? Discounting your achievements and focusing on failures.

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
I only went for a walk and didn't go to the gym.	I am glad I went for the short walk. It still kept me moving and active.
I didn't lose weight this week, it's not fair.	I didn't lose weight this week, but I have stuck to plan 90% of the time which will help me lose weight in the long run.

### 3. Overly Positive Fortune Telling

Hope of a better future is important to our overall health, but overly positive fortune telling may lead to weight gain. Statements such as the following will sabotage weight management...

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
It doesn't matter if I eat this, I'll go for a walk later to work it off.	Think about how things usually turn out when you have those type of thoughts.
I'll just have one slice of cake and then I'll stop.	I have thought this in the past, but I never end up working the excess food off.
	I usually don't stop once I have cake, so I won't have it, I'll have coffee/tea/fruit instead.

## 4. Emotional Reasoning

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
I am so angry – I have to have chocolate.	<p>I am so angry/bored/stressed - food is not going to make me less angry. What have I put in place for myself - what is my coping mechanism that I have learnt?</p> <p>How am I going to feel tomorrow if I give in to my emotions now?</p> <p><i>(In the module on emotional eating you will learn how to find alternative ways of thinking and how to deal with your emotions.)</i></p>
I'm bored; I am going to see what's in the fridge.	
I feel so stressed – I need a glass of wine	

## 5. Catastrophising

You might be in the habit of making negative predictions about the future. The following thoughts may lead to weight gain;

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
I'll never be able to give up my toast and jam in the morning.	I will try not to have toast and jam one day this week and see how that works for me.
This plan won't work, I will fail, I always fail at everything.	I will give this plan a try and do the best I can. I have succeeded in other areas of my life (think about examples), I can do this.

## 6. Mind Reading

At times, you may think you know exactly what someone else is thinking, but really, none of us are mind-readers. If you try to mind read, it can certainly lead to over eating. A common example is when you are a guest and think –

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
My host won't like me if I say no to her scones, and everyone will think it strange if I just drink water and say no to wine.	<p>Most people understand and are not offended if you say that you are eating healthy.</p> <p><i>"I can't please everyone all of the time-but not eating unhealthy food/drink will be good for me and I will feel pleased with myself"</i></p>

## 7. Should / must statements

Should statements put pressure on you and elicit feelings of guilt and do not change unhealthy weight management behaviours.

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
I should be able to manage this food plan.	Replace the word 'should' with will/could/might etc.
I must go to the gym today.	I will learn more about my new food plan and take it one step at a time. I might go to the gym later, I will feel better afterwards.

## 8. The Reward Fallacy

Do you expect to be rewarded for your efforts? Do you feel bitter if you are not? Have food and alcohol rewards been a part of your life?

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVES
I stayed on plan all week – today I deserve a treat.	I stayed on plan all week, I reward myself with a manicure/new book/etc.
I have lost 10 pounds – I deserve something sweet.	I have lost 10 pounds, I have reached my goal and will have a massage/pedicure/etc.

In order to manage your weight, you need to identify and change sabotaging/unhelpful thinking. It will take time and be patient with yourself.

## LEARNING TO CHANGE SABOTAGING THOUGHTS

**Step 1:** Recognise that you are having a sabotaging thought. Become a scientist and start observing your thoughts. We are not used to do this but the more you tune in to what you are thinking the more mindful you will become and notice your thoughts. Try and figure out what type of thought it is. Is it “catastrophizing”, or “All or Nothing” thinking etc.

Write the thought down and then think of a more helpful thought to replace it.

**Step 2:** Prepare and plan ahead so when such a thought comes into your mind, you know exactly what to do. For example, if you know stress triggers you to overeat, and the thought that goes with that is " I had a stressful day, I deserve to have some chocolate", then have an alternative prepared. This could be that you call a friend or take the dog out or go for a walk, as long as it distracts you.

(We will talk more about alternatives in another module)

**Step 3:** If your thought is something like "I must do .... otherwise I won't succeed" or I should be in the gym more often" and those thoughts cause you stress, think about why it is that you "must" or "should" do something. Try and replace those thoughts with " It would be good if I could go to the gym five times this week, but if I manage only three times, that's Ok too. I'll try again next week.

**Step 4:** Best results are achieved when you prepare for as many situations or triggers as you can think of and write each one on an index card. In order to get your mind to learn how to deal with those sabotaging thoughts, read those index cards a couple of times per day and soon you will be able to automatically find helpful thoughts to replace those sabotaging thoughts.

**PREPARE MANY INDEX CARDS AND READ THEM DAILY.**

<i>I am bored watching TV, I'll see what's in the fridge</i>
<b>RESPONSE:</b>
<i>Food is not going to make me less bored. When I am bored with TV I will take my book and read. (or any other activity I have planned)</i>

