

STB *Unhelpful thought patterns common in judgemental stance*

We are all prone at times to patterns of thinking that tend to maintain negative emotional states, thoughts and beliefs. When we are tired, stressed or our mood is lower, these patterns become more exaggerated. They are often difficult to spot because, with repetition, they become automatic. The following thought patterns have been identified as contributing to and maintaining a wide range of mental health problems. They may all be relevant to the problems of people with body image disturbance.

Black or white/all-or-nothing thinking

All-or-nothing thinking means thinking in absolutes, as if things are either black or white, good or bad, with no middle ground. You are either a complete success or a failure. For example, you are either thin or fat. You either look perfect or you look hideous. There is no such thing as looking OK, and no in-between.

Do you engage in this kind of thinking? If so, can you think of any examples of your own?

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Catastrophising

This involves making catastrophic conclusions or predictions. You may catastrophise something that has happened, e.g. if you've gained a pound, you may think that your weight is swinging out of control, or about the future, e.g. 'I know I will never get married because of my disgusting body. No one could ever love me looking like this.'

Personal examples:

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Overgeneralisation

Making a general rule from one single event. You can spot this when you notice yourself using words like always, never, every, nobody. For example, 'I always look dreadful when I go out. I'm never going to be happy with my body. Nobody will ever find me attractive looking like this.'

Personal examples:

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Mind reading/jumping to conclusions

Making assumptions about how others are thinking and assuming that other people are reacting negatively to you. For example, if you walked past a group of people who started laughing, you might think 'I know they are all laughing because they are looking at how fat my stomach is and talking about it', when actually they could have been laughing because one of them had told a joke or they were sharing a funny memory.

Personal examples:

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Taking things personally

This is often linked to mind-reading and jumping to conclusions and means taking responsibility and blame for an event even if it has little or nothing to do with you. Also, assuming that actions or comments are directed at you when that's not necessarily true. For example, thinking 'That person was really unfriendly because he thought I looked ugly',

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rather than considering that he might have been having a bad day, feeling unwell or tired.

Personal examples:

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Negative focus/discounting the positive

Focusing on the negative and ignoring or misinterpreting positive aspects of a situation. This may include focusing on your weaknesses and forgetting your strengths, filtering out anything that is good. For example, if you believe you look ugly, you will notice and remember the times you were teased because of the way you looked rather than when someone paid you a compliment.

Personal examples:

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Selective attention and magnification

This is a related pattern to negative focus/discounting the positive. Selective attention means that you notice and remember certain things more than others. It often means focusing attention on little flaws, and avoiding seeing the big picture. What you selectively attend to is often in line with your beliefs about yourself. So if you are unhappy with your body it is likely that you will pay a lot of attention to any body part you consider imperfect rather than seeing yourself as a whole. When you pay too much attention to something, it often starts to become magnified.

Personal examples:

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Living by fixed rules and 'should' statements

Having fixed rules and unrealistic expectations, regularly using the words 'should', 'ought', 'must' and 'can't'. For example, thinking 'I should always look perfect', or 'I must work out every day'.

Personal examples:

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Emotional reasoning

Assuming that because you think or feel something, that is how it really is and believing your thoughts and feelings are accurate when they may not be. For example, 'I feel fat therefore I *am* fat'; 'I feel worthless, therefore I *am* worthless'.

Personal examples:

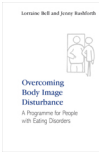
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Labelling

Labelling means putting a label on yourself that is reductionist, usually negative and inaccurate. You are making a global statement about yourself. For example, 'I am a fat pig'.

Personal examples:

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RE-EVALUATING YOUR THOUGHT PATTERNS

Consider the following to evaluate your thoughts:

1. Do I do any of the above thought patterns (e.g. black-and-white thinking, emotional reasoning)? Which in particular?

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2. How might this affect me and my thoughts and feelings about my body?

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3. When am I most likely to do this?

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4. How else could I think about it?

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5. What other points of view are there? What would I say to a close friend about this thought? How would someone else think about this?

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6. What is the evidence in support of my thought or belief? What is the evidence against it? Which is more convincing?

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