

Thinking Traps

(and how to push back on them)

Trap

Example

Strategy

All-or-Nothing Thinking: You think in terms of false dichotomies

"I ate a donut for breakfast. The day is ruined."

There are shades of gray when you accept the complexity of your decisions, and behaviors.

Blaming: You refuse to accept your responsibility in a situation

"It's not my fault I ate too much. They were shoving food in my face."

Take responsibility for your decisions. If you don't like the outcome, change your response.

Overgeneralization: You conclude a single negative event is a never-ending pattern of defeat

"I ordered fries with my dinner. I'll never be able to break my addiction to fried foods."

Universals are words such as "never," "always," and "every." Reframe your response without using those words.

Emotional Reasoning: You take your emotions as evidence of the truth

"I feel guilty for eating those chips, so eating chips must be bad."

Examine the evidence. What are the facts that support your emotionally-based determination?

Mind Reading: You assume you know what others think and feel

"She knows I'm trying to eat better, so she's testing me with cookies!"

Challenge your assumptions. How do you know what you're telling yourself is true?

Filtering: You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives

"I screwed up by eating ice cream today" (but ignore the fact you got one scoop instead of your usual two).

Instead of viewing the situation as entirely negative, acknowledge what went well and what could still be improved.

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Catastrophizing:
You exaggerate the importance of your failures, fears, and imperfections

"I ate out a couple times this week. I'm totally gonna gain 10 pounds."

Challenge your exaggeration with facts. Is what I'm thinking *really* true?"

Labeling:
You label yourself when there is a negative event

"I didn't eat any vegetables today. I am such a failure."

Define yourself by your efforts, not your outcomes.

Fortune Telling:
You assume you know what will happen

"I'm going to a potluck today. I'm sure I will eat too many desserts."

What evidence is there for your predictions? They don't have to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Minimization:
You downplay positive events

"I actually went to the gym today, but I didn't even burn off my lunch."

Intentionally make note of the positive choices you make each day and give yourself credit for those.

Should Statements:
You have rules about what you should and should not do

"I shouldn't eat anything that has added sugar."

Be careful with the words "should," "ought," and "must." Think about what is realistic and create expectations for yourself from there.