

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.

For more information:

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 01/2018