

A COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO WEIGHT MANAGEMENT



Judith S. Beck, PhD

President, Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy
Clinical Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania

Deborah Beck Busis, LCSW

Director, Weight Management Program, Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Have you ever lost weight on a diet, only to gain it back again?

Have you felt out of control of your eating and at the mercy of your hunger and cravings?

Have you made eating decisions that aren't in line with your goals and regretted them afterwards?

Have you used food as a coping mechanism when you felt stressed, anxious, tired, or bored?

Have you worried about the impact your weight is having on your health, but felt powerless to change it?

If so, please know that you are in very good company. These are common challenges among most people who struggle with their weight and eating. But please know that there is hope. The reason you have not been successful in the past is not because you didn't want it enough or try hard enough. It's because you didn't know how. By learning and practicing specific Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques, you will learn to make permanent changes in your behavior by making changes in your thinking. This can help you build habits that support your personal weight loss and health goals.

SABOTAGING THOUGHTS

CBT teaches us that our thoughts influence the way we feel and behave much more than the situations we experience on a day-to-day basis. Many people initially believe that a situation automatically leads them to engage in a specific behavior, such as eating something that's not in line with their goals. If they were feeling stressed, they might think the stress caused them to go to the kitchen and overeat. But it's not the situation that made them overeat. It's their thinking *about* the situation.

When someone who struggles with weight management gets stressed, they may think, "I'm so stressed; eating is the only thing that will make me feel better." Or they may think, "I'm so stressed, I deserve to eat to help myself calm down." We call these **sabotaging thoughts** – thoughts people have in trigger situations that lead them to eat. CBT teaches people to recognize what sabotaging thoughts they're likely to have (and what sabotaging thoughts they've had in the past) and respond



to them effectively so they are less likely to engage in unhelpful behaviors.

HOW TO ADDRESS SABOTAGING THOUGHTS WITH CBT

Learning how to respond to sabotaging thoughts is an important part of CBT. Next time you feel stressed, instead of thinking, “I’m stressed, so I deserve to eat,” you may say to yourself:

“I’m stressed, and I deserve to feel better. But I also deserve to achieve my health and weight loss goals, which are so important to me. Instead of eating, which ultimately sabotages other goals, I’m going to go for a walk/do a five-minute mindfulness meditation/listen to some music/call and vent to a friend, etc. These things will help me calm down without any negative consequences.”

Here are examples of common thinking errors and sabotaging thoughts, along with helpful responses that can keep you on track:

All-or-nothing thinking: You see things in only two categories, when they are really on a continuum).

Example: “I’ve made an eating mistake, so I’ve blown my healthy eating plan today and might as well give up and start again tomorrow.”

Response: One mistake does not mean I’ve blown anything! If I get right back on track this minute, I can go to bed feeling proud of my ability to recover. If I missed my exit on the



highway, I wouldn’t think, “Well, I’ve blown this trip. I might as well keep driving five more hours in the wrong direction.”

Self-deluded thinking: You tell yourself things that you really do not believe at other times).

Example: If no one is watching me eat, it doesn’t really count.

Response: My body processes calories in the same way whether zero people or 100 people are watching me eat.

Mind Reading: You are sure you know what others are thinking, (even in the absence of compelling data).

Example: Everyone will think negatively of me if I eat differently.

Response: It’s likely that some people will be happy for me if I’m eating healthfully and some won’t notice or won’t care what I’m eating.

Emotional Reasoning: You think your thoughts must be true because they feel true, even if there is evidence to the contrary).

Example: Since I feel so hopeless about losing

weight, it must really be hopeless.

Response: Everyone gets discouraged from time to time. It's normal. I'll only stop losing weight if I decide to give up.

COGNITIVE AND BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES FOR WEIGHT LOSS

CBT for weight loss and maintenance teaches cognitive and behavioral techniques, including how to:

- *create new, healthy eating habits, like eating sitting down, slowly, and mindfully*
- *motivate yourself daily and give yourself credit for your successes*
- *differentiate between physical hunger and emotional hunger*
- *deal with negative emotions without turning to food*
- *create and stick to a food plan*
- *stay on track, even when you're tempted to give in--and recover immediately when you do make a mistake.*

Most importantly, you will learn to reflect on difficulties you may have putting each of these skills into place, identify sabotaging thoughts, and effectively respond to them. Once you learn how to respond to sabotaging thinking that can interfere with your progress, you'll be able to consistently make decisions that support your goals.



MAINTAINING YOUR PROGRESS

Successfully losing weight and keeping it off is not about avoiding triggers. Everyone feels negative emotions; everyone is in situations where others are eating and drinking different things; everyone makes mistakes. It's about learning to identify the sabotaging thoughts you're likely to have once you're triggered and responding to them effectively so you can make progress and maintain it long-term. CBT for weight management can help you build resilience and confidence through everyday choices that support your desired lifestyle.

CBT RESOURCES

BECK INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy was established in 1994 by Dr. Aaron T. Beck and Dr. Judith S. Beck as a setting for state-of-the-art psychotherapy and professional training in CBT.

BECK INSTITUTE WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Dr. Judith S. Beck and Deborah Beck Busis developed the Beck Institute Weight Management Program to be different from other weight management programs. Using cognitive behavior-based strategies, the program empowers clients to make healthy lifestyle choices. The program includes easy-to-use tools, including hunger monitoring scales, daily planning schedules, weight loss graphs, and motivational cards for handling time/energy hurdles, eating out, and other high-risk situations. Learn more at beckinstitute.org.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Cognitive behavior therapists can help you identify, evaluate, and modify your unhelpful ideas and behavior that lead to negative conclusions about yourself and others. They can also help you figure out ways to more effectively manage day-to-day problems. With your effort and their guidance, you can learn skills to reduce interpersonal conflict and help you feel better and stay better. To learn more about clinical services at Beck Institute, call 610.664.3020 or email intake@beckinstitute.org.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

- Visit beckinstitute.org for webinars, video clips and multimedia resources
- Read the Beck Institute blog (beckinstitute.org/blog)
- Shop for books, DVDs and more in our CBT Store (beckinstitute.org/store)
- Sign up for the Beck Institute Newsletter (bit.ly/beckinstitute)
- Engage with Beck Institute on social media:



facebook.com/beckinstitute



twitter.com/beckinstitute



linkedin.com/company/beck-institute-for-cognitive-behavior-therapy/



youtube.com/beckinstitute

SUPPORT BECK INSTITUTE

Beck Institute is a 501(c)3 nonprofit with the mission of improving lives worldwide through excellence and innovation in Cognitive Behavior Therapy training, practice, and research. Help us continue our work with a gift today!

Give now at beckinstitute.org/give-now.