

A COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO WEIGHT MANAGEMENT



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

Have you felt out of control of your eating?

Have you made decisions that aren't in line with your personal health 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 eating decisions are 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 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 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 make unhealthy eating decisions. But it's not the situation that caused them to eat in an unhealthy way. It's their thinking *about* the situation.

When some people get 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 individuals have in trigger situations that lead them to eat, even if they aren't hungry. CBT teaches people to recognize 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 goals, which are so important to me. Instead of eating unhealthy foods, 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 jeopardizing my health goals.”

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, 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 food 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 believe 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 using unhealthy eating as a coping strategy;***
- ***create and stick to an eating plan; and***
- ***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 decisions that may not be in line with their goals. 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. Since its inception, Beck Institute has built exceptional in-person and online trainings in CBT, trained tens of thousands of professionals from around the world, and created a global community of CBT practitioners.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Cognitive behavior therapists can help you identify, evaluate, and modify unhelpful thoughts about yourself, the world, the future, and other people. 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 help you feel better and stay better. To learn more about clinical services at Beck Institute, or to search for a Beck Institute Certified CBT clinician in your location, visit our [Beck Institute Cares website](#).

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (US): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line: 741742

ONLINE RESOURCES:

- Learn how [CBT can help](#) with other conditions and common challenges.
- Visit [our Cares website](#) for articles, blogs, and multimedia resources about CBT.
- Read the [Beck Institute Cares blog](#).
- Sign up for [our newsletter](#).
- Engage with Beck Institute on social media:



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