



WAYS OF GETTING RID OF NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

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Annotation

We all have negative thoughts at times. Anger, fear, shame and other unpleasant emotions are normal when they arise and then fade away. However, if you get stuck in negative thought patterns, not only do they make you unhappy, they can cause or worsen anxiety and depression, and can even have a negative impact on things like your immune system and overall health.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to counteract negative thinking. In fact, doing so regularly can actually change the neural pathways in your brain to make positive thinking more of the default for you.

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Negative thinking can take many forms. Three of the most common are:

- **Overanalyzing.** When making important decisions, it is wise to take your time and consider your options. However, assessing the alternatives can evolve into obsessing about them. The reality is that, no matter how much you think about a decision, there is no way to know with certainty what will result from making a particular choice. To break this pattern, you first have to identify that you are in it. At that point, set a deadline for making a decision. Allow yourself a reasonable amount of time for research and reflection, but then make your choice and stick to it.
- **Negative rumination.** A certain amount of reflection about where you have been and where you are headed in life is healthy. But when those thoughts turn negative and you spend too much time on them, that thought pattern can be very unhealthy. A good strategy for stopping rumination is to start something (really, anything) else. Talk with a friend. Get some exercise. Work on a favorite hobby. Taking action is not “avoiding the problem,” but instead is a way to put it in the proper perspective.
- **Outward-directed anger.** We have all been mistreated by someone, whether that is a family member, a friend or a stranger. In some cases, these experiences can cause us to have a negative opinion not only of that person, but everyone like them or just everyone. We start to assume the worst about people and those negative feelings can cause us to lash out or completely withdraw. A healthier approach when you are consumed by angry and cynical thoughts about someone





is to try and see the world from their point of view. How do they feel about you? What is their motivation? What has been done to them to make them who they are? Pausing to consider these kinds of questions can help you see someone in a new, less negative light.

Evolving Your Awareness

There is no “quick fix” for negative thinking. Avoiding toxic thought patterns and developing a new perspective on life takes time and effort, but it can be done. One thing that can help is seeing that negative thoughts tend to focus on either the past or the future. By learning to “live in the current moment,” you can avoid getting stuck in regrets or dread.

Start small. See if you can focus solely on the sensations of one activity for 30 seconds or a minute. Feel the warm water on your hands as you wash them, smell the soap, see how the bubbles form and pop. As you start to succeed at maintaining your present-moment focus on these kinds of tasks, you may notice that you feel “refreshed” by them. Extending this practice to longer and longer periods can counteract negative thought patterns and do wonders for your state of mind.

It happens to the best of us. There you are, happily going along your ordinary day-to-day when suddenly, a thought pops into your head from out of nowhere: “What if I’m making a big mistake?” And then comes the ripple effect: “I have no idea what I’m doing. Why did I say that? Why did I agree to do that? I can’t do that.” And it goes on, sometimes replaying conversations to analyze how stupid you must have sounded or what another person *really* meant.

What ensues is a crippling chain reaction that, along with each ensuing negative thought, sets your mind on a deeper downward spiral towards virtual combustion, leaving you paralyzed in its wake. It’s like you’ve single-handedly managed to blow up your entire world in an instant—and all in the confines of your own mind. Chalk up those thought patterns to survival instincts and a biological sense that we aren’t going to live very long (depressing, we know). Our brain has evolved to survive, and has a bias toward threat detection, says psychiatrist Grant H. Brenner M.D., FAPA, co-founder of Neighborhood Psychiatry, in Manhattan.

Along with this constant scanning for threats, we are designed to use negative information far more than positive information to inform our world. When you think about this in the context of evolution it makes sense. Survival depends more on spotting danger than enjoying the warmth of a nice cave fire.

And it’s not just that we gravitate towards using that negative information; it even carries more weight. Negative thoughts are more powerful in our brain processing





than positive ones. In fact, researchers say that we require more positive messages (at least five) for every negative one to keep things on an uplifting trajectory.

“It’s become a more maladaptive function as we’ve gotten more technologically developed and advanced. We can’t deal with things getting better, so our fight-flight systems can make us respond to one another badly,” he says. It’s like a communal glitch in our collective existence. “We lack compassion and see strangers as enemies rather than family. We think the planet is vaster and more omnipotent than it is—an illusion which will shatter badly if we aren’t thoughtful and wise,” Dr. Brenner says.

It’s a vicious cycle too. Basically, the brain becomes trained to look for and recognize threat early—both internally and externally, which leads to greater attention to negative thoughts, re-enforcing them, and making them more frequent. “Like a car engine running in neutral, the default mode network of the brain runs an operating system that loops in more negative thoughts and memories, which go around and round diminishing the functions of the brain which could interrupt that looping,” Dr. Brenner says.

The Impact of Negative Thoughts

The ramifications of this negative thought cloud can be detrimental. “Obsessing over a negative thought can become such a focus it can be difficult to engage with what’s happening in life,” says clinical psychologist Kristin Naragon-Gainey, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology in The University of Buffalo’s Department of Psychology. “This can lead people to withdraw from who they’re with and what they’re doing.” And not to mention, push other people away. “It can be harder to enjoy things because you’re more tuned in to what could go wrong; it can create friction with other people and fuel even more stress.” Dr. Naragon-Gainey says.

Why Are Some People More Prone to Negative Thoughts?

“Having negative experiences in childhood, as well as adulthood, may strengthen, confirm, and/or create sticky expectations that the world is a negative place,” Dr. Brenner. “Such expectations can come up as negative thoughts, which are defenses against disappointment and other reactions, as well as simply accommodating to the way the world really seems to be,” Dr. Brenner says.

So, for example, someone with a negative thinking parent may internalize those ways of seeing the world and oneself. However, another person in that same situation might respond adaptively by adopting a more positive way of appraising





things. From a biological standpoint, less resilient people are more likely to worry and get stuck in negative thinking, Dr. Brenner says.

How To Stop Negative Thoughts

But, the good news is, you don't have to be stuck in a negative spiral (read that statement again so it sinks in). You can consciously work to turn that Debbie Downer mentality around. And it starts by recognizing your negative ways of thinking.

- **Imagine a stop sign literally.** This can help put the brakes on the negative thought as it strikes. "This kind of visualization—of a literal diversion—can help move your attention away from negative thoughts," Dr. Brenner says. You can also try distracting yourself—listen to music, go for a walk, imagine a positive memory, call a friend. "Switching to another task where you can get absorbed in something more efficacious helps build self-esteem and give you a realistic positive reappraisal." he says.
- **Be curious, not self-critical.** This is a way of being kind to yourself when uncomfortable thoughts come up. "Giving yourself a compassionate pause can serve as a distraction, an interruption, and a way to change the activity of brain networks," Dr. Brenner says. Studies show, over time, compassion-based practices, such as giving yourself a positive affirmation like, "I'm doing the best I can," or "I'm being really hard on myself," can help a great deal to change the way the brain responds to negativity by reducing self-critical thinking and anxiety.
- **Pay attention to the thought itself.** Did you ever realize, the more you try not to think about something, the more you, in fact, think about it? "When people try to push negative emotions away, they unintentionally grow stronger," Dr. Naragon-Gainey says. Studies show being mindful by honoring and accepting the thought and trying to work through it in a constructive way can help resolve the underlying issues. "Practice noticing the thought without jumping to judgement," she says. Try to understand why thinking this way is problematic. Say things like, "Is this thought accurate? Is this thought helpful?" Taking a cognitive perspective can help you cultivate more accurate and helpful ways of thinking and feeling.

Used Literature

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