



Change Your Thoughts. Change Your Life.

A 10-day Self-Directed Smorgasbord Challenge Designed to Create Less Stress and More Relaxation

May 10 to 19, 2021

Cognitive Reframing (also known as Cognitive Restructuring) is a stress reduction technique used to help people alter their perceptions of stressors. Think of reframing as a re-scripting of our thinking and a way to help us to recognize that negative automatic thoughts affect our moods, behavior and physical health.

Our body's stress response is often triggered by our perceived stress rather than by actual events. This is not to say that our brain sets out to lie to us about what's happening in a certain situation. But, sometimes we just have to question what our brain is telling us because it may have developed a faulty lens or harmful connections over time.

Often, we follow a particular train of thought that takes us down a very hard to get out of rabbit hole. It is not that we consciously decided to go down this path but it is where we often end up. Repeated falls into this rabbit hole without intervention can have long lasting negative effects on our overall health.

“Groceries, you need to learn how to select your thoughts just the same way you select what clothes you’re going to wear every day. This is a power you can cultivate. If you want to control things in your life so bad, work on the mind. That’s the only thing you should be trying to control. Drop everything else but that. Because if you can’t learn to master your thinking, you’re in deep trouble forever.”

Eat, Pray, Love (2006),
by Elizabeth Gilbert

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Like anything else, changing negative or distorted thinking habits takes practice and effort. We may not master the ability to reframe immediately but with vigilance and desire to change negative thought patterns or distorted thinking, we can develop more positive thought habits. Learning to reframe or rescript our thinking of stressful situations will create more relaxation and peace.

No registration is necessary.

- Complete the Cognitive Restructuring Log a minimum of six days out of the ten.
- Refer to the Cognitive Distortions List. Each of these cognitive distortions is a label for the various negative automatic thoughts we have.
- Refer to the “Questions to Ask Yourself About Stressful Automatic Thoughts” handout to support you each time you are challenged by negative automatic thoughts. For added support, see the attached list of Mini Breathing Techniques which can be practiced anytime you need to stress less.
- Return your completed log and prize forms to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org or mail to MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by May 30, 2021 to be eligible for prizes (only MIIA/BCBS members are eligible for prizes)

“We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

Albert Einstein

Cognitive Distortions List



1. Seeing all or nothing: You place people or situations in black or white categories. No shades of gray. You see yourself as a total failure if your performance falls short in any area.

Healthy response: You recognize a mistake or poor choice, but are able to see it as one event among the many things you do right and as an opportunity to do things differently next time.

2. Generalizing: You see a single, unpleasant event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Healthy response: You see a single, unpleasant event as just another bump in the road; one that you can bounce back from.

3. Mental filtering: You dwell on a single, unpleasant detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of reality becomes distorted and darkened.

Healthy response: You select and think about a positive detail and things that you are doing well.

4. Disqualifying the healthy or positive: You reject or discount healthy decisions you make or positive remarks made to you. This maintains an unhealthy belief.

Healthy response: You embrace healthy decisions and feel good every time you make a healthy choice. You listen to what others say and respond to compliments with a "thank you".

5. Jumping to conclusions: You make an unhealthy interpretation even though there are no facts to support your conclusion. Examples of this include:

- a. *Mind reading* – You conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you and don't find out if you are correct.
- b. *Fortune telling* – You anticipate things will turn out bad and are convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

Healthy response: Assume things are going well, that people like you and are reacting positively to you, unless you have clear evidence these things are untrue.

6. Magnifying or Minimizing: You exaggerate the importance of events (such as an unhealthy decision or someone else's achievement), or you inappropriately diminish the importance of positive events until they appear very small (i.e., your own desirable qualities, eating healthy, exercising when you plan to).

Healthy response: Celebrate you're own and other's achievements, small and large. If you feel jealous, acknowledge that and remind yourself of your own attributes. Share in other's happiness.

Cognitive Distortions List



7. Basing facts on your emotions: You assume that negative emotions reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true".

Healthy response: Don't jump to conclusions on days you don't feel well or are particularly sensitive to things.

8. Using "should" statements: You try to motivate yourself with "should's" and "shouldn't's", as if you have to be punished before you can do anything. ("I really should exercise. I shouldn't be so lazy.") "Musts" and "ought's", are also offenders. This thinking makes you feel guilty, which typically make you less motivated to act in healthy ways. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

Healthy response: Motivate yourself by remembering the good feelings or events that come with making a healthy choice. ("Exercise is hard but I sure do feel good afterward".)

9. Labeling and mislabeling: These are extreme forms of generalizing. Instead of identifying a poor decision, you attach a negative label to yourself. You say "I'm stupid." When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to that person, such as "What a jerk he/she is." Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly judgmental and emotionally charged.

Healthy response: Acknowledge your decision, put it in perspective, and move on. ("I realize I shouldn't have eaten that much ice-cream, but this doesn't mean I am a failure or that I blew everything. I have been good at following my diet all week and I'll get right back on track.")

10. Personalizing: You see yourself as the cause of some unhealthy external event, which you were not responsible for. "My daughter's child is overweight because I am overweight and I should have done something about my weight issue sooner because things would be different."

Healthy response: Don't take on the blame that belongs to other people. "The fact that my daughter's child is overweight is certainly not my responsibility and my weight issue is very separate from hers."

The benefit of changing unhealthy self-talk includes a reduction in stress levels, a change in perspective, increased positive mood, improved psychological and physical health and encourages problem-solving skills.

Adapted from *The Arthritis Foundation's Guide to Good Living with Fibromyalgia*.

Questions to Ask Yourself About Stressful Automatic Thoughts

Is this really true?

Am I jumping to conclusions?

What is the evidence?

Am I exaggerating or overemphasizing a negative aspect of the situation?

Am I "catastrophizing"?

How do I know it will happen?

So what if it happens?

Is it really as bad as it seems?

Is it to my advantage to maintain this appraisal?

Is there another way to look at the situation?

“Mini” Relaxation Exercises



Mini relaxation exercises are focused breathing techniques that help reduce anxiety and tension immediately. Your breath is with you at every moment in time. You can do a Mini with your eyes open or closed (but keep your eyes open when you are driving). You can do a Mini at any place, at any time, and no one will know you are doing it.

MINI #1: Count very slowly to yourself from 10 down to 0, one number on each outbreath. Thus, breathe in, and on your first outbreath, say “10” to yourself. With the next outbreath, say “9”, working your way down to “0”. When you get to “0”, notice how you feel.

MINI #2: As you breathe in, count slowly up to “4”, as you breathe out, count slowly back down to “1”. Thus, as you breathe in, you say quietly to yourself, “1..2..3..4,” and as breathe out, you say quietly to yourself, “4..3..2..1”. Do this several times.

MINI #3: This is counting the space between the inbreath and the outbreath. Thus, after each inbreath, pause and count, “1..2..3”, after each outbreath, pause again and count, “1..2..3”. Do this several times.

MINI #4: Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist, uses this as his favorite Mini. On the inbreath, you think, “I am”, and on the outbreath, you think, “at peace”. Repeat this several times. This is also an excellent Mini to use while walking.

MINI #5: Square breathing. Visualize a square. On the inbreath, visualize a vertical line and then a horizontal line. On the outbreath, you visualize another vertical and horizontal, and you complete the square.

GOOD TIMES TO DO A MINI:

While engaging in negative self-talk, stuck in traffic...when on hold during a phone call...while waiting in your doctor’s office...when someone says something that bothers you...in the dentist’s chair...when you feel overwhelmed by all you need to do...while standing in line...when in pain...in the night when you can’t sleep...etc., etc.

The only time minis do not work is when you don’t do them

How to Elicit the Relaxations Response: Ann Webster, Ph.D.

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Please complete the following log form in full. Return it to Mary Harrington at mharrington@mma.org OR mail to Mary at MIIA, 3 Center Plaza, Suite 610, Boston, MA 02108 by May 30, 2021. NOTE NEW MAILING ADDRESS IF MAILING. To earn a prize, you must complete the log for at least 6 out of 10 days. All log forms must be unique in the case where a spouse or dependent is also participating. Only MIIA /BCBS members can earn prizes.

Name _____ Employer _____

Date	Event or circumstance	Physical and Emotional (feelings) Symptoms	Negative Automatic Thoughts	Cognitive Distortion(s) *Refer to the list included.	Positive Thoughts (Rational Response)
SAMPLE	I forgot an important point I wanted to make in a meeting	Tense, tight muscles, headache, anxiety, unhappy with self	"What a loser. I wonder what I'll screw up in my next meeting?"	Generalizing	"Next time I will be sure to look at my notes just before the meeting."
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					
Day 8					
Day 9					
Day 10					

Total #of days log form completed: _____

Open to all employees, only MIIA/BCBS members are eligible for prizes.

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Name _____ Employer _____

MIIA/BCBS subscriber: Yes No

Email _____ Phone _____

Mailing address _____

Prize choice. Choose 1st and 2nd choices. If you don't specify, we will choose your prize. [Click](#) to view below prizes. Can also view at [emiia.org](#). Click on Well Aware, then click on Incentives. Only MIIA/BCBS members eligible for prizes.

___ Balance Active tote

___ Shoulder wrap

___ BBQ utensil set

___ Body wrap

___ Wind chimes

___ Collapsible cooler

___ Yoga block

___ Waterproof Bluetooth
outdoor wireless speaker

___ First aid kit

___ Nature Sound Spa

___ VODAPOD 32-ounce Water
Bottle with Time Marker

___ Zuma cooler
backpack

___ Yoga strap

___ Sports towel in a mesh bag

___ Pet Lovers travel kit

___ Insulated cotton cooler lunch tote

___ *Conversations with a Black Man*
by Emmanuel Acho

___ Outdoor headlamp

___ Shake it work out bottle

___ Slope Messenger Bag

___ Waterproof picnic blanket