

Tracking Your Thoughts



When you feel down, you may think about things in negative ways. For example, you may have angry, sad, guilty or self-critical thoughts. Those negative thoughts may lead to more feelings of sadness, anger or guilt and may lead you to behave in ways that makes things worse. Your thoughts, feelings and behaviors affect each other and can make depression worse.

Depression is an illness that makes us likely to think negative thoughts. Our thoughts affect our self-image, our self-esteem, our mood and our behavior. Part of treating your depression is correcting distorted thoughts and replacing them with factual, realistic thoughts.

To practice identifying automatic thoughts, write down how you would feel in these situations.

Situation: You are home in your pajamas. It is in the middle of the afternoon. The doorbell rings. It's your neighbor, who wants to know if you will take a package that is scheduled to arrive while she is on vacation. The neighbor looks at your appearance and asks if everything is okay.

What would be your automatic thoughts? Before you answered the door? Once you saw your neighbor? When she asked you to do the favor? After she asked about you?

Situation: You need to go grocery shopping, but you don't want to. You find clean clothes and take a shower to prepare for the trip. Then you make a list of what you need. You catch the bus and arrive at the grocery store only to find out that you forgot your list.

What would be some of your automatic thoughts? How would they make you feel?



Tracking Your Thoughts (continued)

Situation: You have been invited to a family reunion. You will see people you have not seen in a long time. You take extra care in choosing your clothes and make a pasta salad to bring to the event. After you arrive, you notice that your shoelace is broken. You bend over to tie a knot in the lace when several relatives come up to compliment you on your delicious salad.

What would be some of your automatic thoughts?

Follow-up: There are many ways to perceive a situation. Re-read what you wrote down as your automatic thoughts in the situations above. Can you think of other ways to look at them or react?

Alone or with a therapist, think of alternative, balanced thoughts someone could have had in these situations. Do you think they are realistic? Would your mood or behavior be different after having those alternative thoughts?