

Be Happy! Replace Negative “Self-Talk” with More Realistic Thoughts

Joan, 68 years old, wonders why her daughter often visits just before meal time at her assisted living facility, leaving only few minutes to spend together before dinner. Joan thinks her daughter does this deliberately to avoid spending too much time with her. Joan knows she tends to focus on the negatives in her life, such as her aches and pains. Instead of being able to enjoy her daughter's visits, she is dissatisfied, wishing that her daughter would visit for longer periods of time. Joan never talks to her daughter about this; instead she concludes that she really must be the unpleasant person that others in her life want to avoid.

It's easy to get stuck in negative thought patterns. Seniors At Home can help.

It comes as no surprise that negative emotional states (i.e. anxiety and depression):

- can prevent restorative sleep
- can increase stress
- can increase high blood pressure and harden blood vessels

Many of us have negative thoughts that we automatically go to as explanations for events that happen in our lives. The negative thoughts are often not true, but carry over from other times in our lives and can trigger negative emotional responses.

The challenge is to be aware of the things that trigger those thoughts and to recognize that there may be other explanations for what you are experiencing. Once you recognize a pattern of negative “self talk,” you can learn to substitute more balanced and perhaps more accurate thinking. By changing your thoughts, you can begin to affect the way you habitually respond – both emotionally and behaviorally.

Some strategies you can use to minimize the impact of the negative thoughts:*

- **Acknowledge your thoughts** – be conscious of them; not to eliminate them but simply to see them for what they are – just thoughts, not facts.
- **Challenge your thoughts** – argue and counter the negatives ones; for example “I think people looked at me funny just now when I said that; I feel like an idiot. Wait a minute. John said something like that last time, and he is no idiot. Maybe I was mistaken in the way people looked at me; perhaps they just couldn't hear me well.”
- **Interrupt your thoughts** – some people visualize a stoplight or stop sign, or imagine hearing a buzzer or alarm as soon as they recognize they are thinking negatively.
- **Walk away from your thoughts** – change the subject, create a diversion or distraction (tackle a chore; call a friend) do whatever provides respite. Train your brain to break the cycle of negative thinking. It's like training ourselves to throw left handed if we are right handed. Don't do what comes naturally, but make an effort to do it differently from what was familiar. Over time and with practice, we can develop new thought patterns which are more positive and perhaps more realistic as well.

**Please contact Seniors at Home's Boost Program if you are interested in having a specialist work with you to make changes. Medicare will pay for services if eligible.
Call 415-507-0564.**