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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

EATING DISORDERS

# Does Self-Talk Lead to Binge Eating?

Your eating disorder likely has a voice. What is it saying to you?

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Reviewed by Vanessa Lancaster

**KEY POINTS**

- **Research suggests that negative self-talk can lead to and maintain unhealthy eating behaviors.**
- **Recovering from an eating disorder starts with listening to the underlying messages of our internal dialogue.**

Source: Deagreez/istockphoto

*This guest post was written by Gia Marson, Ed.D.*

Researchers estimate that a person generates about 6,200 thoughts a day. That's a lot of ideas, dreams, beliefs, questions, worries, and hopes feeding into our self-talk. Does the tone of what we say to ourselves make a difference in our outlook? Absolutely. The conversations we have with ourselves, just like our conversations with others, can be either constructive or destructive.

When it comes to eating and body image, it's essential to look at whether our internal dialogue is unintentionally causing harm to our health.

## Inner Thoughts Can Have Powerful Consequences

*"You mainly feel the way you think." — Albert Ellis*

deprivation, rigid eating rules, and losing control with food—and lead to binge eating disorder, if unchecked. Negative beliefs such as the ones that follow may seem innocent enough, but they can be abusive, punishing, dismissive, and limiting:

- If I don't control my eating, I'm going to gain weight and be rejected.
- Some foods are dangerous. I have to be careful.
- I'm disappointed in myself for ruining my diet.
- I have no self-control. I'm worthless.
- Rejection and criticism from others won't be as bad if I'm thinner (or more muscular).
- Because I didn't stick to my diet, I must eat less and exercise more.
- I'm a failure. I can't make friends because I'm not good enough.
- They're so lean and muscular. I want to look like that.
- I am disgusted by people who have no self-control.
- I'm proud of myself for eating exactly according to my diet.

body and how I eat.

- Being disciplined doesn't work for me. I might as well eat anything I want.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

## Negative Self-Talk and Eating Disorders

*"Counting calories is not the answer, because eating is not the problem." — Anita Johnson*

Thematically, the inner dialogue about the "benefits" of an eating disorder includes being looked after or protected, having a sense of control, and feeling special.

nected with the appearance of their body; and that their self-identity and values were subjugated, along with thoughts of a healthier or more positive nature. The study concluded that our inner dialogue could play a significant role in developing and maintaining an eating disorder.

## Listen to What's *Really* Being Said

Rather than dismiss the self-talk generated by the eating disorder, stay curious about its message. Notice what needs, wishes, and fears these thoughts raise. The eating disorder may be revealing parts of you that need to be incorporated into your life. Investigate the underlying message in the negative self-talk: Do you need to be listened to more often? Is something in your life making you feel unsafe? Do you have a need that's not being met? If you struggle with anxiety, what are your anxious thoughts about? Do you have healthy ways to cope well with anxiety-provoking thoughts?

Listening closely to the chatter in your mind and cultivating behaviors that align with more profound messages can give you more power for a recovered life.

der as having its voice. But there's also another voice talking: your true inner voice.

To get more in tune with your wise and true inner voice, try journaling. Writing down your self-talk can help you distinguish the conflicting voices in your head. To cultivate and lean into the internal motivation to recover, take particular note of pro-recovery thoughts or the costs of the eating disorder like these when journaling:

THE BASICS

What Are Eating Disorders?

Find a therapist to heal from an eating disorder

- being upset or burdened by pervasive thoughts about food, physical appearance, or weight
- feeling controlled by the eating disorder
- feeling as if you deserve to be happy, even if you don't look a certain way

- having concerns about your health
- wanting to feel energized and nourished, not exhausted and deprived
- recognizing that lying and isolating just aren't you
- feeling tired of not permitting yourself to enjoy a variety of foods
- wanting to place your relationships above eating rules, compulsive exercise, or negative body image
- noticing what you're missing out on

## Breakthrough the Self-Talk Barrier

Your negative self-talk is a barrier to making peace with food. Notice the negative thoughts from the eating disorder, and pay attention to the thoughts that come from a desire to feel good, be healthy, and cultivate close, supportive relationships. Use self-compassion to combat thoughts of self-blame. Try journaling to discover the underlying messages of your inner dialogue. Lasting recovery is possible for you.

**References**

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