



Gia Marson, Ed.D., and Danielle Keenan-Miller, Ph.D.

The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

SELF-TALK

I Think Therefore I Eat: 5 Mindsets for Healthier Eating

Change your thinking and you could change your eating.

Posted September 13, 2023

Reviewed by Gary Drevitch



Source: JillWellington/ Pixabay

By Gia Marson, EdD

Choosing to eat in a healthier manner, without the restrictions of dieting, involves an important shift in mindset. Dietary thinking is often associated with rigidity,

self-blame, and feelings of failure. Thoughts like these can reduce feelings of agency, induce pressure, lower self-esteem, and ultimately even push you toward giving up, fasting, dieting, losing control, or rationalizing.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Instead, replace those thoughts with energizing, practical, and loving thoughts that support your desire to take care of yourself through healthy eating, diet-free. Following are 5 evidence-based thoughts that you can engage in to support healthy, relaxed eating. Each person's mind is unique, so give each of these thoughts a try and see which is most effective for you.

"**Relaxed eating** is the ability to be at ease with the social, emotional and physical components of food and eating. Relaxed eating is attuned to the body's hungers and intuitively provides for its needs. It is the ability to listen and satisfy your hunger allowing for pleasurable and whimsical eating with flexibility and the absence of remorse." —Sondra Kronberg, MS, RD, CDN, CEDRD-S

1. "I am a Healthy Eater" or "I am a Relaxed Eater."

Our first recommended thought type is based on **research led by Justina Paluckaitė**, who uses the theory of self-schema, or *self-identity*, as a possible pathway for facilitating healthy or relaxed eating through increased positive, yet gentle control.

This kind of thinking moves the emphasis away from individual action—e.g., what do you want to do right now?—and toward identity—e.g., What kind of person are you, and how would that kind of person act right now?

The first part of this theory looks at how identity is managed through self-talk. In this context, the thought, “I am a healthy eater,” is a way of affirming your identity as someone who eats well.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Humans love to categorize themselves and others. This important heuristic helps us navigate through an overwhelming amount of information and complexity in the world. You can use this heuristic to your advantage. Putting yourself in the box of “healthy eaters” or “relaxed eaters” is more likely to trigger helpful action pathways in your brain as you come to associate with that identity rather than describing yourself as a dieter, a mindless eater, or an out-of-control eater.

2. “Healthy Eating or Relaxed Eating Is Important.”

Multiple studies show that self-schemas predict consistency in eating. Values are another pathway linked to self-schema—

or the *perceived importance* of healthy eating.

If you're struggling to convince yourself of your new identity as a healthy or relaxed eater, try this second aspect of self-schema thinking: letting yourself know that you value healthy or relaxed eating because it's important to you.

✓ THE BASICS

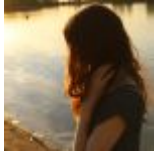
[Find a therapist near me](#)

Humans tend to prioritize actions meeting the needs that are most important to them. It may seem that you procrastinate following up on important emails, and thus are not acting on what is important, but have you considered that rest and fun are *more important to you* than checking emails at that moment?

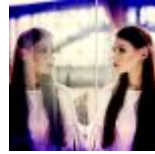
ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT



In this vein, consider casting the net wide and deep to find ways to give healthy or relaxed eating high importance. Does it impact your energy? The love you have to give? Setting and moving toward your goals? The drive to create? Notice which thoughts reinforce the importance of eating well, most of the time.



Influencing Our Inner Voice



3 Powerful Ways to Help Manage Your Inner Critic

3. “What would [your name] do?”

Some people may find connecting deeply with identity and beliefs a little too confronting. They may lack self-connection skills but have copious skills in helping others. You can harness this “helping” nature with the use of *distanced self-talk*, our third recommended thought type, based on [research by Furman et al](#) (2020).

Distanced self-talk involves using first-person pronouns and names during self-talk and thoughts. Instead of saying, “What am I going to eat right now,” a person named Emily using distanced self-talk might use a thought such as, “Emily, what are you going to eat right now?”

In their study, Furman's team found that participants who used distanced self-talk chose healthier foods. In addition, in participants who weren't dieters, this benefit occurred without having to have had any health goals primed first.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT



新界西面積最大的
新型甲級工廈

屯門
全新甲級工作坊

開啟

CS9
COMMONS

4. “This apple is crunchy, cold, and juicy.”

The concept of *mindfulness* has been in the popular consciousness for a while now. Jon-Kabat-Zinn, who has created leading mindfulness-based stress reduction programs, describes the practice as "paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." Mindful thoughts can also be a powerful tool for healthy, non-diet-based eating. By bringing yourself into the moment, and into what's alive in you, mindfulness promotes an intentional and savoring attitude that lends itself to enjoying various aspects of what you eat and making healthier choices.

So, how do we construct a mindful thought when wanting to support healthy eating choices? One way is to mentally annotate sensory observations about food while consuming it: For example, “I am feeling this cool apple juice slide down my throat.”

You might also choose to connect with how you feel, as certain bodily sensations of stress may be unconsciously driving you toward less healthy and conscious choices.

5. “I am kind to myself.”

Self-compassion is another helpful concept related to thinking that supports a healthy or relaxed style of eating. Rather than focusing on external and bodily observations, self-compassion focuses specifically on identifying negative self-talk and paying attention to how it feels when you replace those distressing thoughts with kinder language.

In the work of Hussain (2021), self-kindness was linked to the choice of grape consumption in participants who were low

fruit and vegetable consumers. It didn't have an impact on participants who already ate well on this metric. This technique is exciting news for people who are new to a healthy eating journey. If your habits tend away from fresh fruit and vegetables, you can begin expressing thoughts of self-kindness to try to increase your intake of these foods.

Thoughts such as, "How could this snack be a way of taking good care of myself right now?" may support you on this journey.

Pay Attention to Your Mindset

These mindsets can support you in your kind, relaxed, non-diet-based eating intentions.

- Self-identity and values
- Self-compassion
- Distanced self-talk and mindfulness

Changing your thoughts to support a way of eating that you consider healthy or relaxed is an active practice, but a worthwhile one. The purpose isn't to control your appetite or change your body, but instead to build the kind of relationship with food that aligns with your identity and values.

References

Furman, C. R., Kross, E., & Gearhardt, A. N. (2020). Distanced Self-Talk Enhances Goal Pursuit to Eat Healthier. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 8(2), 366–373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702619896366>

Hussain, M., Egan, H., Keyte, R., & Mantzios, M. (2021). Exploring the Role of Self-Kindness in Making Healthier Eating Choices: A Preliminary Study. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 28(5), 664–669. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-020-09942-0>

Nelson, J. B. (2017). Mindful Eating: The Art of Presence While You Eat. *Diabetes Spectrum: A Publication of the American Diabetes Association*, 30(3), 171–174. <https://doi.org/10.2337/ds17-0015>

More



ADVERTISEMENT



在屍群中求存
拯救這片受感染的土地・成為統治者
全面屍控

開啟 >

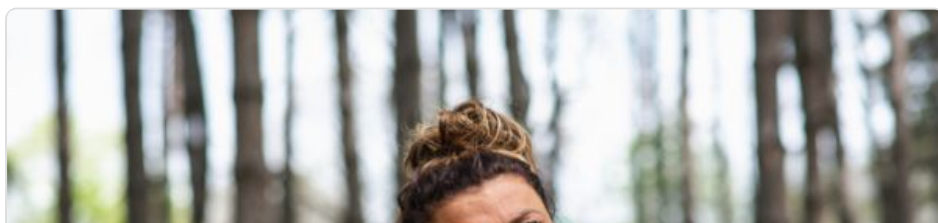
About the Author



Gia Marson, Ed.D., and **Danielle Keenan-Miller, Ph.D.**, are co-authors of *The Binge Eating Prevention Workbook*.

Online: [Dr. Gia Marson, Inc.](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#)

More from Gia Marson, Ed.D., and Danielle Keenan-Miller, Ph.D.





DIET

5 MIN READ

Do All Diets Lead to Losing Control With Food?

Avoiding enjoyable foods, limiting the amount, and general restraint are associated with losing control.



EATING DISORDERS

4 MIN READ

Do Mirrors Help or Harm Eating Disorder Recovery?

Mirrors are a complex tool when it comes to eating disorders and body image.





ADHD

5 MIN READ

What Role Does ADHD Play in Eating Disorder Treatment?

Studies show that people with ADHD are more than three times as likely as the general population to develop an eating disorder.



EATING DISORDERS

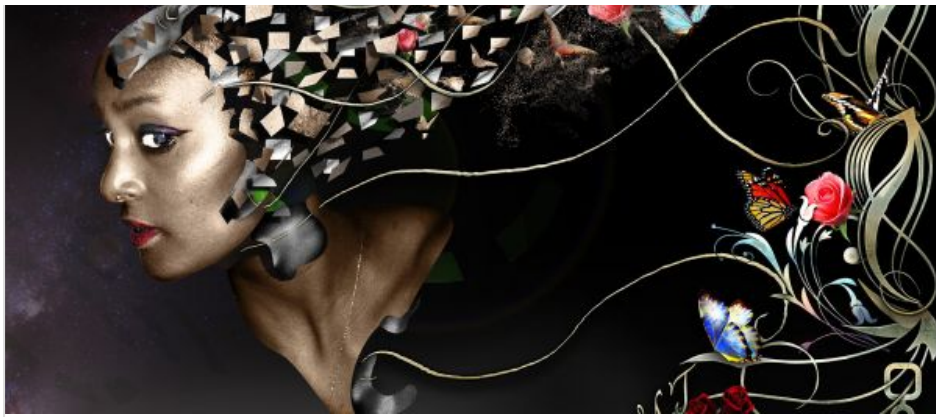
4 MIN READ

9 Tips for Improving the Gut–Brain Connection

The gut–brain axis is a vital modulator to whole-body health, regulating emotions, cognitive functioning, digestion, and more.

More from Psychology Today





SELF-TALK

4 MIN READ

Calming the Monkey Mind

Do you have an inner voice that hinders your success?



SELF-TALK

4 MIN READ

5 Ways to Stop Beating Yourself Up

It's easy to be your own harshest critic. Better to be your best friend.





SELF-TALK

5 MIN READ

Silent Third Person Self-Talk Facilitates Emotion Regulation

Try using your own name during inner dialogues.

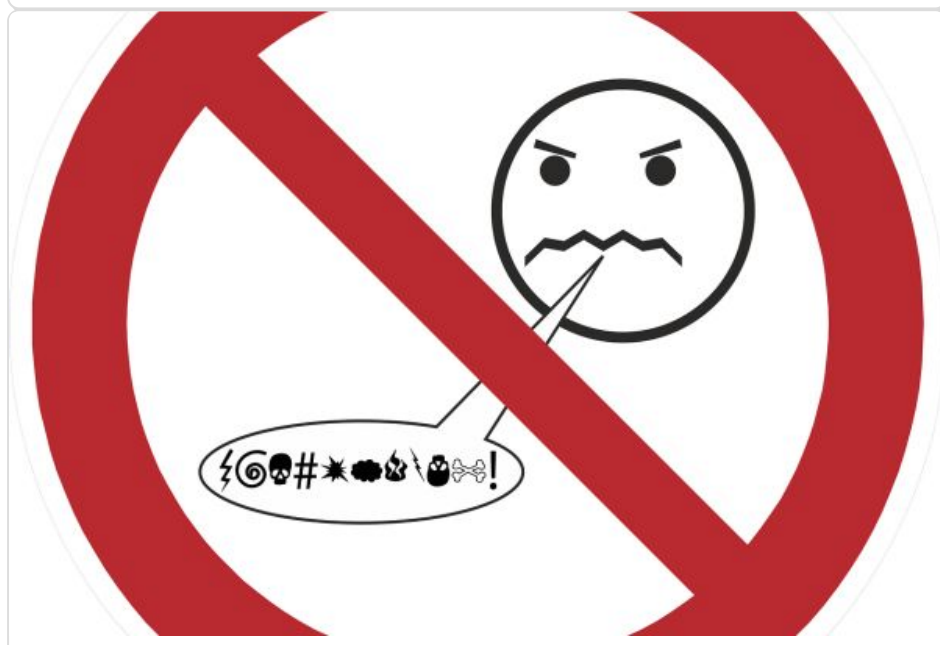


SELF-TALK

8 MIN READ

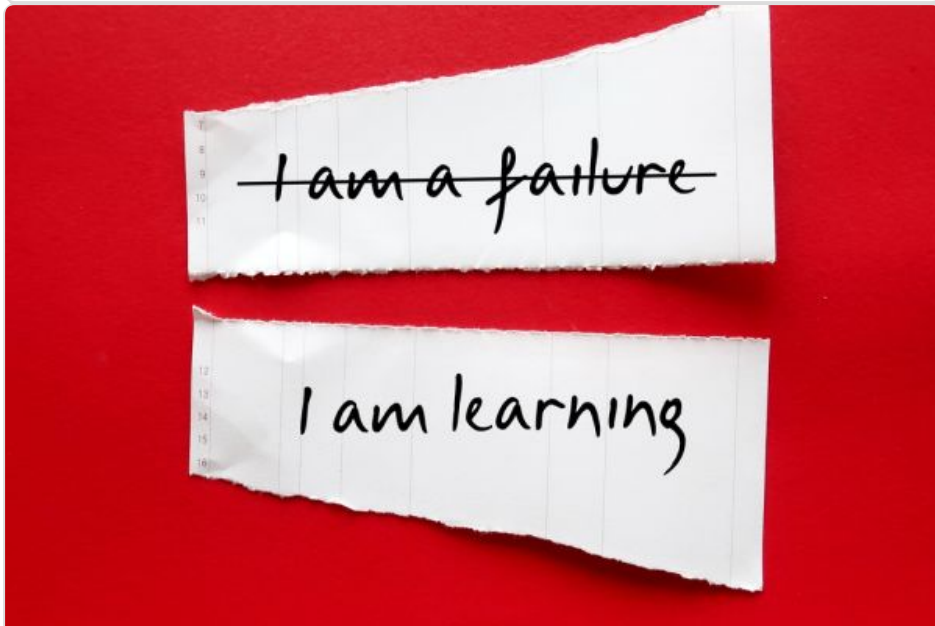
10 Ways You Are Causing Your Own Unhappiness

How to stop suffering right now



Cursing a Lot?

Cursing may feel good in the moment, but it has a self-destructive side.



Are You Too Hard on Yourself?

3 keys to work with the inner critic: recognize it, understand its motivations, challenge negative messages.



Why Kids Engage in Negative Self-Talk And What You Can Do

In these moments, children rarely mean exactly what they say. They are in a highly-charged state, flooded with emotions.



SELF-TALK

4 MIN READ

8 Easy Tricks to Quiet Negative Inner Dialogue

Take your power back from the inner critic.

Find a Therapist

Get the help you need from a therapist near you—a FREE service from Psychology Today.





Cities:

Atlanta, GA

Austin, TX

Baltimore, MD

Boston, MA

Brooklyn, NY

Charlotte, NC

Chicago, IL

Columbus, OH

Dallas, TX

Denver, CO

Detroit, MI

Houston, TX

Indianapolis, IN

Jacksonville, FL

Las Vegas, NV

Los Angeles, CA

Louisville, KY

Memphis, TN

Miami, FL

Milwaukee, WI

Minneapolis, MN

Nashville, TN

New York, NY

Oakland, CA

Omaha, NE

Philadelphia, PA

Phoenix, AZ

Pittsburgh, PA

Portland, OR

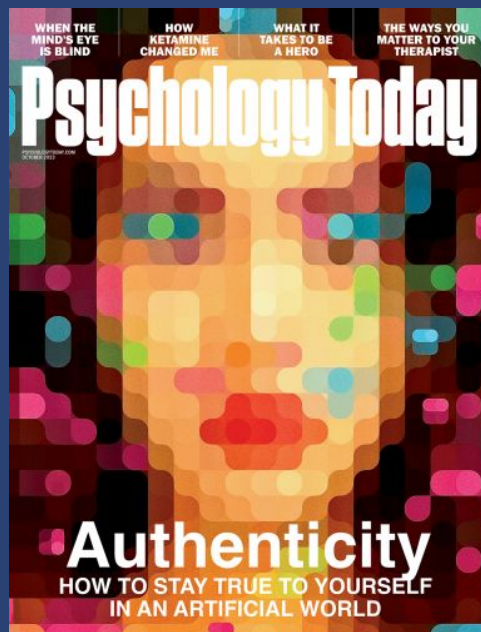
Raleigh, NC

Sacramento, CA

Saint Louis, MO
San Antonio, TX
San Diego, CA
San Francisco, CA
San Jose, CA
Seattle, WA
Tucson, AZ
Washington, DC

Are you a Therapist? [Get Listed Today](#)

Psychology Today



[Subscribe Today](#)

[About](#)

[Editorial Process](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Terms](#)

[Accessibility](#)



United States

Psychology Today © 2023 Sussex Publishers, LLC