



Cognitive Distortions

There are some common thinking traps which repeatedly appear with those suffering with disordered eating. Known as cognitive distortions, these thinking habits consistently lead people to interpret reality in unhelpful/ unreal ways. Individuals think they are seeing things in a logical manner and yet, when in the midst of an eating disorder, their perceptions are altered. Ideas about food, weight and what is seen in the mirror are skewed. These distorted thought patterns create irrational expectations about the consequences of eating and not eating.

Cognitive distortions are used by people with eating disorders as they provide guidelines for behavior in order to gain a sense of safety, control, identity, and containment. Recovery is about noticing the patterns used and choosing not to act on them or, better yet, to replace them with more positive or realistic ways of thinking.

1. **All or nothing thinking:** You see things in black-or-white categories. If a situation is anything less than perfect, you see it as total failure
***Eg. I've eaten it now, I've blown it.*
2. **Overgeneralisation:** You see a single event as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using the words *always* or *never* when you think about it
***Eg. I will never get better.*
3. **Mental filter:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively. One word of criticism erases all the praise you've received
***Eg. They said I look "healthy": I must have put on weight.*
4. **Discounting the positive:** You reject positive experiences by insisting they *don't count*. If you do a good job, you tell yourself that anyone could have done as well
***Eg. After 3 days I have binged again. I am hopeless.*
5. **Jumping to conclusions:** You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion. Two common variations are *mind reading* (you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you) and *fortune telling* (you assume and predict that things will turn out badly)
***Eg. They didn't invite me out, they must hate me.*
6. **Magnification:** You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize your desirable qualities. This is also called the *binocular trick*
***Eg. X didn't want to come out with me- eek, no body likes me!!*
7. **Emotional reasoning:** you assume that your negative emotions reflect the way things really are
***Eg. Things will never get better*
8. **Should statements:** You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. Many people try to motivate themselves with *should's* and *shouldn't's* as if they had to be punished before they could be expected to do anything
***Eg. I must exercise for an X time every day and can not ever eat Y*
9. **Labeling:** This is an extreme form of all or nothing thinking. Instead of saying *I made a mistake*, you attach and negative label to yourself *I'm a loser*
***Eg. I am a failure*
10. **Personalisation and blame:** you hold yourself personally responsible for events that aren't entirely under your control
***Eg. If only I had been a better daughter my dad wouldn't have had a heart attack*