

Healthy Self-Talk

Self-talk refers to those little conversations you have with yourself—either in your head or out loud. These “conversations” can be self-critical or positive and supportive. Turning negative into positive self-talk is a vital step toward a normal, healthy relationship with food.

Self-talk and food choice



What you say to yourself about your eating affects your food choices. You may use self-talk to encourage better eating. Or, as many people do, you may use negative self-talk to punish yourself about an overeating experience. Or you may criticize yourself for a less nutritious food choice. Rather than lead to more nutritious eating, however, this type of self-talk actually leads to a dislike of nutritious foods and a decline in nutritious food choices. Furthermore, it exacerbates guilt and leads to unpleasant eating. By avoiding the self-criticism and simply observing and commenting on your eating experiences without judgment, you can have a substantially positive effect on your eating.

Body acceptance leads to better nutrition

Negative self-talk also makes you feel bad about your body. When you feel bad about your body, your eating and your ability to enjoy nutritious food choices is negatively impacted. For example, when you criticize your thighs as flabby or fat, that may lead to a restrictive eating day...salads and fat-free everything. The next day you crave and binge on cookies, chips, fast food, etc., as a response to the restrictions of the day before. Again, the negative self-talk has led to a penalizing eating pattern. Now you associate salads, potentially a very nutritious and enjoyable food, with restriction and penalty. The cookies, chips and fast food become synonymous with freedom, reward and enjoyment. To top it off, you still feel bad about your body!

Turning self-talk into an ally

To normalize your eating and feel better about your body, you must re-program your self-talk. The more your messages to yourself are positive and supportive, rather than critical and demanding, the more you will be able to make positive, healthy changes in your lifestyle. "Beating up on yourself" about your eating or your body doesn't help you make the changes necessary to eat more nutritiously and be more physically active.

Use the attached "Self-Talk Record" to record your self-talk, uncover the triggers for it, and turn the negative into positive. The more you practice this technique, the more you will accept your body and your eating today. *It is very important to accept your body the way it is now*, not waiting until you've lost weight, in order to begin to take care of your health and nutrition needs. As contradictory as it sounds, this acceptance actually helps move you toward the health and nutrition changes you need and want to make.

