

Fact-Checking Your Thoughts

Learning to identify and challenge negative thoughts



ACUTE
CENTER FOR EATING DISORDERS
& SEVERE MALNUTRITION
BY DENVER HEALTH
A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

A thought record is a tool that helps you notice unhelpful thoughts, understand how they influence your emotions and behaviors, and respond with greater awareness. When negative thoughts about food, body image or self-worth feel overwhelming, examining and challenging them can reduce their intensity and help you feel more grounded and in control.

Use this worksheet to take back control of your thinking, challenge unhelpful patterns and develop responses that align with your recovery.

Step 1: Situation

- Describe what happened. Be specific.

Step 5: Evidence Against the Thought

- What makes this thought less true or unhelpful?

Step 2: Thought

- What automatic or unhelpful thought came to mind?

Step 6: Alternative/Balanced Thought

- What is a more balanced or helpful way to think about this situation?

Step 3: Feeling

- What emotion(s) did you feel (0-10)?

Step 7: Outcome

- How did you feel after challenging the thought? Did it affect your behavior?

Step 4: Evidence for the Thought

- What makes you think this thought might be true?

Don't struggle alone.

Reaching out can be your next step toward recovery. Contact us today to learn how we can help you find stability and a path forward.

ACUTE accepts patients 15+ years of age of all gender expressions suffering from severe medical complications associated with an eating disorder and/or severe malnutrition.



Call **877-228-8348** to speak with a member of the ACUTE admissions team.

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Finding Clarity in Emotions Before They Take Over

Identifying feelings for calmer thinking

Naming and taming it is a mindfulness skill that helps you manage strong emotions by putting words to what you're feeling. Naming emotions can reduce their intensity, making them feel less overwhelming and easier to understand.

Use this skill to pause before reacting, giving yourself a chance to respond in a way that feels helpful rather than automatic.



Making Sense of Emotions in the Moment

Step 1: Pause and Notice

Take a moment to stop what you're doing and pay attention to what's happening inside you.

- What am I feeling right now?
- Where do I feel it in my body?

Step 2: Name the Emotion

Try to give your feelings a clear label. Use one word or a short phrase (e.g., anxious, sad, overwhelmed, lonely, ashamed)

- My emotion is: _____

Step 3: Describe It

Put your feelings into words. Try to capture what's happening without judging yourself.

- What thoughts or memories are connected to this feeling?
- How strong is this feeling (0-10)? _____

Step 4: Tame It

Use coping strategies to calm your body and mind.

You can combine this with TIPP, STOP, grounding or other skills you've learned.

- Which skills will I use?
- How will I respond mindfully to this feeling?

Step 5: Reflect

After using the skill, check in with yourself:

- How do I feel now?
- What worked well or what didn't? What can I try next time?

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Preparing for Stress Before You're in the Middle of It

Building a plan that helps you reduce overwhelm

Planning ahead helps you prepare for emotionally challenging situations before they happen. By recognizing potential triggers, planning how you'll respond and rehearsing recovery-focused coping strategies, you can navigate stressful moments with greater confidence and intention.

Coping ahead is especially helpful for situations that may feel emotionally difficult, like mealtimes, social events or triggering environments. [Use this skill to stay grounded, make mindful choices and support your recovery when stress is high.](#)

Step 1: Identify the Upcoming Challenge

- What situation or event is coming up that feels stressful or triggering?
- Where or when do you expect urges, anxiety or difficult to occur?

Step 2: Anticipate Your Feelings and Urges

- What thoughts, feelings or urges might you notice during this situation?
- What signs indicate that you're starting to feel overwhelmed?

Step 3: Choose Your Coping Skills and List Your Strategies

Examples:

- **TIPP:** Temperature change (cold splash), intense sensory input, paced breathing, progressive muscle relaxation
- **STOP:** Stop → take a step back → observe → proceed mindfully



Building Your Stress-Response Toolkit

Step 4: Plan Your Actions

What specific actions and coping skills will you use before, during and after the situation?

- Before:
- During:
- After:

Step 5: Rehearse and Visualize

Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the situation. Practice using your coping skills and visualize staying calm, grounded and in control.

- What will you notice in your body when you're using your skills?
- What thoughts or self-talk will help you stay focused?

Step 6: Reflect

After the situation, check in with yourself:

- Which coping skills worked well?
- What could you try differently next time?

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Slowing Down When Your Mind Is Racing

Using distress tolerance skills to calm the nervous system

TIPP skills are practical distress tolerance tools that help reduce intense emotions when they feel overwhelming. TIPP stands for **T**emperature change, **I**ntense sensory input, **P**aced breathing and **P**rogressive muscle relaxation – all body-based strategies that help calm the nervous system quickly and safely.

Use these strategies to help calm your body, reduce distress and regain a sense of control.

T

Temperature
Change



Cooling the body lowers the heart rate and breathing, shifting your attention away from intense emotions.

I

Intense Sensory
Input



Intense sensory input creates strong sensory signals that interrupt overwhelming emotions.

P

Paced
Breathing



Paced breathing increases oxygen intake and lowers blood pressure and heart rate.

P

Progressive Muscle
Relaxation



Tensing and relaxing muscles helps the body let go of stress.



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Grounding Yourself During Moments of Mental Overload



Temperature Change

Try it yourself:

- Briefly immerse your face in a shallow bowl of cool water while holding your breath; repeat two or three times
- Take a cold shower
- Apply an ice pack or ice cube to your face (*avoid extreme or prolonged exposure*)
- Hold a wet cloth to your face or neck
- Drink a glass of cold water

Why it works:

Cooling the body lowers the heart rate and breathing, shifting your attention away from intense emotions.



Intense Sensory Input

Try it yourself:

- Move your eyes up and down, side to side or in circular patterns
- Sniff a strong scent (e.g., coffee beans, perfume, essential oils)
- Clap your hands or snap your fingers
- Listen to loud music
- Have something sour or with strong flavor (e.g., lemon candy, mints)
- Squeeze a firm or textured object (e.g., stress balls, stones, fidget toys)

Why it works:

Intense sensory input creates strong sensory signals that interrupt overwhelming emotions.



Paced Breathing

Try it yourself:

- Inhale through your nose for four seconds
- Hold your breath for four seconds
- Exhale through your mouth for four seconds
- Repeat

Why it works:

Paced breathing increases oxygen intake and lowers blood pressure and heart rate.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Try it yourself:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position
- Tense the muscles in your feet for five seconds
- Slowly relax these muscles
- Repeat these steps, working upward to your calves, thighs, mid-section, back, chest, arms and face

Why it works:

Tensing and relaxing muscles helps the body let go of stress.

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Navigating Food, Body and Socializing Without Feeling Overwhelmed

Building distress tolerance to help you move through challenges

STOP is a simple skill for distress tolerance to help you develop pause when emotions feel overwhelming and reset in the moment. It stands for **S**top, **T**ake a step back, **O**bserve, and **P**roceed mindfully, helping you slow down instead of reacting on autopilot.

With regular practice, you can better manage intense emotions and navigate challenges around food, body image and social pressure with greater confidence.

S

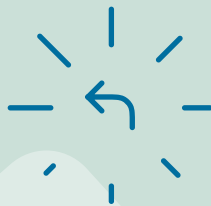
Stop



When you feel that your emotions are going to take over, stop! Pausing prevents you from acting impulsively.

T

Take a Step Back



Remove yourself from what's going on and give yourself some time to calm down and think.

O

Observe



Observe what is happening around you and within you. Gather relevant information before acting.

P

Proceed Mindfully



Proceed mindfully with your goals in mind. Be aware of what might make the situation better or worse.



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Feeling More at Ease in Public

Practice

Over the next few days, practice STOP skills. Use this worksheet to reflect on times when you've felt very emotional and reacted impulsively. If nothing comes up this week, think about a past situation where you could have applied this skill.

- > What emotion did you experience?
- > How intense was the emotion?
- > Were you able to freeze? Yes / No
- > Were you able to step back? Yes / No
- > Did you remember to take deep breaths and continue breathing until you were in control? Yes / No
- > What were your thoughts?
- > What did you observe? What was happening around you?
- > What did you decide that you wanted from the situation?
- > Were you successful in achieving what you wanted? Yes / No

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Staying Ahead of Relapse Before It Happens

Recognizing patterns early to maintain recovery



A relapse prevention plan helps you prepare for situations where difficult emotions or thoughts may make recovery feel more challenging. Planning ahead can help you stay grounded, make intentional choices and feel more supported in difficult moments.

Follow the steps below to build a supportive plan to maintain your recovery.

Step 1: Identify High-Risk Situations

- What situations, times or triggers feel most challenging for you?

Step 2: Pinpoint Early Warning Signs

- What thoughts, feelings, urges or body signals indicate you may be at risk?

Step 3: Identify Coping Strategies / Skills to Use

- Which skills (TIPP, STOP, grounding, self-soothing, etc.) will help you manage the situation?

Step 4: Establish A Support System

- Who can you reach out to for help if needed?

Step 5: Develop An Emergency Plan

- What actions will you take if urges feel too strong or you feel at risk of acting on disordered behaviors?

Step 6: Reflect

After the situation, check in:

- What worked well?
- What could you try differently next time?

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