

PITFALLS IN THINKING



Labeling or Stereotyping

Seeing people or situations as fixed and unchanging, and ignoring other aspects or possibilities; for example, *“My doctor doesn’t care.”* or *“Cancer always comes back.”*

Jumping to Conclusions

Making an interpretation in the absence of clear evidence to support it; for example, when your doctor fails to mention a test result, you conclude, *The results must be bad*; or when a friend fails to return a phone call, you determine, *“She doesn’t want to talk to me; she must be mad at me.”*

Magnification (Catastrophizing) and Minimization

Exaggerating the importance or likelihood of something seen as negative, or minimizing the importance or likelihood of something seen as positive; for example, *“It’s terrible and unbearable that my doctor recommends another treatment or My accomplishments don’t amount to much.”*

Emotional Reasoning

Believing that it must be true because you feel it or fear it; for example, the oncologist spends only a few moments with you during a clinic visit, so you think, *I feel uncared for; my oncologist doesn’t like me*; or when you notice your fear, you think, *If I have negative thoughts my disease will return.*

Mental Filters

Picking out a limited aspect of a situation or experience and allowing it to color your perception of the whole event; for example, you have a hard time finding parking at the hospital, so *The hospital is a horrible place.*

All-or-Nothing Thinking

Seeing everything in black-and-white categories; for example, your spouse doesn’t help you clean up after dinner, so you declare, *“I do everything around here. You don’t care about me at all!”* or you receive an unwelcome test result, so you think, *Nothing ever goes right for me!*

Fortune Telling

You believe everything that your mind predicts as reality despite lack of evidence; for example, you have a day when you feel more tired than usual and you think, *The cancer is coming back and I’m not going to be able to beat it this time.*

Personalization

Interpreting an event as being about you when there are many other plausible causes or interpretations; for example, someone you know initially walks in your direction but, after getting closer, suddenly turns and walks the other way, so you think, *That person dislikes me and was trying to avoid me.*

Perfectionism

Thinking that you *must* or *should* behave in a certain way or else!—often combined with an unrealistic conclusion regarding the consequences of failing to do it; for example, *I must be a good patient, or my doctor won’t give me the attention I need or I must keep appearances, or others will see my imperfections and reject me.*

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