

## Cognition and Moods

Our memories are stored in neural networks organized by mood and time. When we experience a particular feeling/mood, we recall similar periods of time when we felt this same way. These memories influence our mood by strengthening and/or worsening our current emotional state of being. In effect, being in a bad mood triggers memories of previous bad moods, and subsequently, manifests into an interpretation of how we see ourselves as a person. In regards to depression, one might feel depressed in the present moment, think about times they have felt depressed in the past, and combine these thoughts and moods into a more pervasive belief about being worthless/inadequate. These thoughts can become negative patterns of thinking that rob you of your self-esteem.

**Solution:** Become aware of your automatic negative thoughts (ANTs) as they march along inside your head and introduce Productive Ruminations which promote effective problem solving. Positive thinking is just as effective at producing new neuropathways and stimulating production of neurotransmitters as medications used to treat anxiety and depression. Remind yourself that thoughts are interpretations of your memories and mood rather than absolute FACTS. Thoughts and feelings have no value (good or bad), we interpret/label them as such.

**Example:** “Even though things feel overwhelming to me and I often feel like nothing I do is good enough, I want to figure this out and feel better about myself.” Wanting to figure things out and feel better introduces the possibility that things might be different this time around and breaks the cycle of ANT thinking (“I can’t do this”).

**Productive Ruminations:** I want....I hope...I wish...I can....I will...

- I can think what I want and I want to think that I have many good traits.
- I don’t have to leave my negative thoughts on autopilot. I can override ANTS by thinking about something positive.
- What I think effects what I do. I will think about using my strengths.
- Even if I don’t feel like I have the energy, I can choose to do it anyway.
- No matter how difficult things seem, I am resilient and resourceful.

**Plan to Get What You Want:** Plan ahead to do things differently. Take charge. Make a decision. Visualize success and identify the specific steps you will need to take to achieve it.

**Identify and Utilize your Strengths:** Ask yourself, “What do I like?” to better understand what you are good at. Make a list of 10 things you like and 10 corresponding strengths. Ask others what they like about you. How others see you is often very different than how you see yourself. Another way to identify your strengths is to ask yourself, “What do I value?” or “How do I approach getting things done?”

**Appreciate Yourself:** Identify, “What’s right with me and my life?” Make time to regularly practice gratitude by looking back over the past year, month, week, and/or day. Reflect on the “high points” of your life that you are grateful for and ask yourself, “What was my part in making that happen?” At the same time, stop saying bad things about yourself. Don’t say them to yourself and don’t say them to others. Be okay with being your own person by not comparing yourself to others.