

Challenging Your Thoughts Summary

This section of CBT-i gives you strategies to recognize unhelpful thoughts that may prevent you from sleeping or cause negative views about your sleep.

What is an unhelpful thought cycle? The cycle starts after an event or when something happens. After the event, you immediately start to have negative or unhelpful thoughts. Your thoughts then trigger the way you feel or what you do.

Example: One night I watched a horror movie. Afterward, I imagined bad things happening in real life and I became scared. I couldn't fall asleep. I thought I would never be able to fall asleep that night and I would do poorly at work the next day because of it. Then I started to worry about getting fired and being unable to pay my rent. I became more frustrated and scared. My body became tenser the longer I thought about it. I couldn't fall asleep so I picked up my smartphone and played games on it.

Your perception or view of an event affects how you feel and be have. It is not the event itself that creates your unhelpful thought. It is how you view or think about the event. Consider this... You can experience the same amount of sleep but depending on the event, you could feel and behave positively or negatively.

What negative event has caused you to lose sleep?

- Example: I stayed up late one night studying for a test at work. The next day I felt miserable and worried that I wouldn't make it through the day.

What positive event has caused you to lose sleep?

- Example: I stayed up late one night talking to an old friend. The next day I was happy and excited that we reconnected.

Learn to rethink your thoughts. You can reduce extreme thoughts and lessen their impact by challenging or disputing them. Disputing unhelpful thoughts can be done by rethinking them or looking at them differently. This can create a more realistic and helpful thought.

What unhelpful thoughts have you had about sleep?

- Example: I may die without 8 hours of sleep.

What is a more realistic way to think about the unhelpful thought?

- Example: I may be sluggish tomorrow, but I'll survive.

Adapted from US Department of Veteran Affairs "Path to Better Sleep".