Do You Need a Mind Detox?

By Dr. Ramona Warren

This time of year many people are focusing on detoxing their bodies by cleaning up their eating habits and starting exercise programs. But why is it that over 95 percent of people fail to maintain these good habits long term? The high failure rate is due, in a large part, to toxic thinking.

When we set out to change our eating habits and improve our overall health, it requires action. Every action we take first begins with a thought. Most thoughts are automatic, and we are unaware of them most of the time. These automatic thoughts are one of the biggest obstacles keeping people from reaching their health goals.

Imagine you are driving and someone swerves in front of you and almost hits your car. What would your first thoughts be? Would you start yelling at the driver, saying some unprintable words? Or would your first reaction be to think how lucky you were not to get hit? These are the type of automatic thoughts that impact our emotions and, ultimately, our actions.

Some researchers have said, in an average day, we have approximately 30,000 thoughts. Other researchers estimate our daily number of thoughts closer to 60,000. While these estimates may differ, the one thing researchers agree on is that 82 to 90 percent of those thoughts are negative! If almost nine out of ten thoughts are negative, no wonder there are so many health issues and challenges with maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Toxic thinking impacts every area of our lives. Research has shown our thought life is responsible for 75 percent to 95 percent of our illnesses. According to Dr. Caroline Leaf, a cognitive neuroscientist with a PhD in Communication Pathology specializing in Neuropsychology, an uncontrolled thought life helps create the conditions for illness. She states: “Research shows that fear, all on its own, triggers more than 1,400 known physical and chemical responses, and activates more than 30 different hormones.” She goes on to say toxic thoughts can be related to some of the following illnesses: diabetes, cancer, asthma, skin problems and allergies.

This may seem a bit far-fetched but, for thousands of years, Chinese medicine has related different emotions to different organs. Anger is associated with the liver, resentment with the gallbladder, sadness and grief with the lungs, fear with the kidneys. Thoughts have a frequency, or energy, and when we have consistent automatic thoughts that are negative, this negative energy can impact the organ itself.

The book of Proverbs says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” We become what we think about. Even though we may be well intentioned in wanting to detox our bodies, if we don’t change our thoughts we can't truly make lasting changes in our lifestyle. Troublesome thought patterns include:

* Thinking “I could have”, “I would have”, or “I should have”
* Saying “If only…” (Either out loud or inwardly to yourself.)
* Making statements where you form a personal identity with a disease or illness, such as “my diabetes”, “my arthritis”, “my heart disease.”
* Comments like “Nothing ever goes right for me”, or “If it weren’t for bad luck, I would have no luck at all.”

Weight loss comes with it’s own set of problematic thinking. Have you ever said any of the following?

* “I can never lose weight.”
* “If I just smell food I gain weight!”
* “I just CAN’T live without sugar!”
* “I don’t like exercise.”
* “I don’t have time.”
* “Whenever I have lost weight before, I always put my weight back on.”
* “I’ve never been able to stick with anything long-term.”
* “It’s too hard to cook healthy!”

When our thoughts are focused on the negative, it will lead us to sabotage ourselves without us even realizing what has happened.

There is a particular verse in the Bible that I focused on when I struggled with my weight and health: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed my the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:1) Our minds can be renewed. We can change our thoughts and transform our life.

To start, we need to become aware of our thoughts. Once we are aware of how we’re thinking, we can then “capture your thought.” When the thought first enters your mind, learn to delete it if it is negative. Reject the negative thought and replace it with a positive thought. Don’t let the negative take root. Choose the positive thoughts and make those your habitual, automatic thoughts. Our thoughts become our actions, which then become our habits. Developing automatic healthy habits begins in the mind.

Here are some steps that Dan Lippmann, LCSW, the Director of Counseling & Wellness Innovations, recommends to help change your thinking process:

1. **Choose a Specific Situation**: Write a description of your upsetting experience. Be as specific as possible.
2. **Describe the Automatic Thoughts**: Write 2 -5 negative, automatic thoughts that occurred spontaneously and automatically as the situation unfolded.
3. **Identify the Negative Emotions**: List the negative emotions that accompanied each thought.
4. **Identify the Thinking Errors**: Identify the Thinking Errors that are contained within each thought. Thinking Errors include:
	1. **Black and white thinking** (Money is the only thing she thinks about; no other thoughts cross her mind.)
	2. **Psychic Projection:** (I know exactly what she’s thinking. I can read her mind.)
	3. **Psychic Prediction**: (I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that she’s going to act badly and bug me repeatedly about the money.)
5. **Create Logical, Helpful Responses**: Write down logical thoughts or helpful responses to counteract each negative thought.
6. **Verbal Reinforcement**: Read (or have someone else read) each negative thought aloud. Immediately follow this by reading each corresponding helpful response aloud in a strong, emphatic voice.
7. **Visual Reinforcement**: Visualize yourself handling the situation just the way you’d like to, or picture something positive resulting from the situation.

Zig Ziglar summed it up best when he said, “Get rid of your stinkin’ thinkin’.” To change your thinking requires some exercise, but it is the most important exercise you can do to achieve the lasting changes you desire.