

## Surrey Memorial Hospital Cardiac Rehabilitation Outpatient Program

### Change your Mind's Reaction to Stress

Negative thoughts, based on the idea that things are done to us, can control our moods. Actually, events happen, and your negative thoughts about these events may lead to negative emotions, resulting in feelings of helplessness, inertia, and depression.

Use the following techniques to recognize negative thoughts and replace them with positive attitudes.

#### THOUGHT - STOPPING

Thought stopping requires some active work, but if you do it every time you are aware of a negative thought, it will become automatic. Practice the following:

- Sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes.
- Think of a negative thought you want to control. (Example: "I can't finish this project on time.")
- As the thought forms, say "STOP!" (visualize a red stop sign).
- Wear an elastic band around your wrist and snap it when you say "STOP!"
- Relax your muscles for 5-10 seconds and say to yourself, "RELAX."
- Think a pleasant thought (imagine you are at a warm beach, for example).
- When you can stop a negative thought, rephrase it positively. (Example: "I'm doing great – I'll finish this project on time.")
- Repeat this exercise twice.

#### POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Improve your moods by repeating strong, positive statements about yourself.

- Spend 5-10 minutes each day in positive self talk.
- Phrase positive statements about yourself in the present tense. "I feel calm relaxed and positive about this day." "I am a competent and capable person."
- Repeat the phrase 10 times.
- Be positive. Avoid phrases such as "I can't," or "I'm not."

#### SAY "NO" TO NEGATIVE SELF TALK

With negative self-talk, we make catastrophic interpretations:

- "My boss is unhappy" – "he's going to fire me", or we use words such as "always" or "never".
- "You missed our appointment – you always forget about me!" To turn your negative self-talk around.
- Think of an event that caused a stressful emotion.
- Write down what you said and felt about it.
- Consider the objective facts. Is your thinking in line with what really happened?
- Substitute a more rational positive thought for your original negative thought.
- "I can't handle this", becomes, "I know, I can do it."

*SOURCE: "Controlling Stress Before it Controls you" by CMA, 1994*