

September 2024 Wellness Tip: Dealing with intrusive thoughts

Disturbing thoughts that pop into your mind unbidden may make you feel uneasy, but they are common — and there are strategies you can use to manage them.

What are intrusive thoughts?

- *The thought is unusual for you.* An intrusive thought is usually very different from your typical thoughts. For example, it might be uncharacteristically violent.
- *The thought is bothersome.* If a thought is disturbing and it's something you want to push out of your mind, it might be an intrusive thought.
- *The thought feels hard to control.* Intrusive thoughts are often repetitive and won't go away.

Steps to deal with intrusive thoughts

1. *Identify the thought as intrusive.* Say to yourself, “that's just a thought; it's not what I believe; it's not what I want to do; it will go away.”
2. *Don't judge yourself.* Know that having a strange or disturbing thought doesn't indicate that something is wrong with you. “You are NOT your thoughts”.
3. *Don't fight with it.* When you have an intrusive thought, just accept it. Don't try to make it go away. The more you think about an intrusive thought, it might make you more anxious and dwell on them even more. Instead of fighting intrusive thoughts, it's better to learn to live with them.
4. *Exercise deep breathing.* Turn your attention to your feelings, and your body response to these thoughts. You can even write them down, if possible. The more you “observe” these thoughts, the more you will realize that they are not YOU. Most of them will fade away quickly.

If you want to know more about how to deal with intrusive thoughts. Here are some good resources:

- (short and simple) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QXmmP4psbA>
- (more professional) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3vhXQy48jo&t=303s>

Email message adapted from this source: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/managing-intrusive-thoughts>