

# MAKEOVER Your Mind

by **Kathleen Nickerson, PhD**

Now that the New Year had begun, I bet you've noticed a trend on TV and in the media: it's makeover season! It's hard to check out at the supermarket or watch your favorite episode of *House* without being bombarded by messages like, "Now's the time to join Fitness Club USA!" or "Hurry, we are almost out of Fat Burner 900 pills, call now!" And as I flip through the magazines with endless beauty tips, hairstyle ideas, and exercise routines, I wonder: what about making over the things that matters most – our thoughts and feelings.



This New Year, give yourself a mind makeover: look at what you're thinking and telling yourself and decide how you want to feel throughout the year. It's easier than it may seem. All you need is a little time for yourself, a quiet space for some self-reflection and some great questions to get you started. To help you on your journey, here are a few prompts:

### **How satisfied are you with your life right now?**

As you look at your life and think about how happy you are right now, jot down some notes about five major areas of your life; your spouse/partner, your family, your friends, your work, and your faith. These areas may not all seem to be connected to one's happiness, but after years of talking to people who were struggling to feel good, I know that the odds are that if you're not feeling good, the problem is somewhere in those five areas. And it's not uncommon for there to be challenges in all five. Your relationship with your partner is probably the most significant factor in how you feel on an everyday basis. If you are feeling estranged from your family or can't make time to see your friends, it's likely that you feel rather alone in the world. If you are feeling unhappy at work or insecure in your job, my hunch is that you might be struggling to feel good about yourself. If your faith in God or the Universe is waning, then you might be wondering: what is all of this for anyways? Getting back in touch with the people you love, the things that matter to you, and a belief system that helps you feel connected and important will radically change how you feel about your life.

### **Where do you want to be in a year from now?**

It is hard to get to where you want to be if you don't know where you want to go. It may

sound obvious, but most of us don't have a one year, three year or five year life plan because we reason that we'll figure it out along the way. When you leave your fate up to chance, you give up a lot of your power and a sense of control over your life. Instead of waiting to figure things out and be reactive, I suggest you be proactive: decide where you want to go and think about at least one way to get there. One exercise that may help is to create a vision board. A vision board is simply an oversized piece of paper on which you write down your goals, affix pictures or magazine clippings that represent your goals, and include the steps you are planning to take to reach your goals. To help you reach those goals, make your goals public! Share your vision board with someone you love, take a picture and post it on your blog, or plug into the goals system on [ObesityHelp.com](http://ObesityHelp.com) to see if you can find a buddy with the same goals.

### **Are you buying into self-defeating beliefs?**

Aaron Beck, PhD, found that most of us tend to believe in at least one (usually more) self-defeating beliefs. Beck identified the ten most common self-defeating beliefs that he urges us to look out for and work to overcome:

1. Emotional perfectionism: I should always feel happy, confident, and in control of my emotions.
2. Performance perfectionism: I must never fail or make a mistake.
3. Perceived perfectionism: People will not love and accept me as a flawed and vulnerable human being.
4. Fear of disapproval or criticism: I need everybody's approval to be worthwhile.
5. Fear of rejection: If I'm not loved, then life is not worth living.

6. Fear of being alone: If I'm alone, then I'm bound to feel miserable and unfulfilled.
7. Fear of failure: My worth and value depend on my achievements (or my intelligence or status or attractiveness).
8. Conflict phobia: People who love each other shouldn't fight.
9. Emotion Phobia: I should not feel angry, anxious, inadequate, jealous or vulnerable.
10. Entitlement: People should always be the way I expect them to be.

As you review this list, ask yourself, how true is this for me? If you find that it's hard to let go of some of the ideas above, ask a friend to help you do a reality test. Figure out a way to test your belief, look for evidence to support or refute your beliefs, then re-evaluate.

### How are you feeling about your relationships?

Earlier I mentioned that your relationships, particularly the one you have with your spouse or partner, make the single greatest difference in how you feel about yourself. The reason for this is that we are biologically engineered to seek closeness and safety from another person. If you don't feel as loved as you'd like to, there are a couple of things you can do. First, ask for what you want. Do you want more time, more help, or more attention? Let your loved one know. Second, think about what you can do to bring your partner closer to you. Be more tender, more loving, and more appreciative for the things your loved one does right. Third, look for a negative cycle in your relationship and work to change it. A negative cycle exists when one person is upset at the other, reacts by becoming angry or hostile, and this pushes the other person away. When the other person withdraws, this makes the angry partner angrier and the cycle spirals down. It's very common to have a negative cycle in a relationship; the trick is to be on the look-out for it and when you find yourself cycling down, do something different, like asking for what you need.

### How joyful and fulfilled do you feel by what you do everyday?

To know this, I suggest looking at two areas of your life: your job and how you're interacting with your community. Do you feel fulfilled by your job? Do you feel like your life has a sense of purpose? If not, ask yourself what you can do to make changes. Change, especially any change that could have a financial impact, is very scary, but if you plan it out, do some research, and look into some other opportunities, you might be surprised by what you can find. If your job is good, but not great, look for ways to make it better and ask for what you'd really like. If you feel fine about your job and feel like something is just missing from your life, consider volunteering for a cause you feel passionate about. You'll help others and yourself at the same time.

### How are you acting to bring about the changes you seek in your life?

Of all the ideas to think about, this one is perhaps the most important. You are the only person who can make real and lasting change in your life. I find that most inspirational and self-help books tend to fall a little short by not making one thing crystal clear: you can only change yourself. You cannot change other people, you cannot change how others feel, you cannot change what others think. It's no secret. You CAN change you and changing yourself changes everything.



**Kathleen Nickerson, PhD**, is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in working with couples and bariatric issues. She may be reached by email at [drkathynickerson@yahoo.com](mailto:drkathynickerson@yahoo.com).