



Rewriting YOUR INNER VOICE

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Internalized weight bias affects both how we think and how we care for our health. In this article, a psychotherapist and a nurse share two connected perspectives. One focuses on the inner dialogue that shapes emotions and behavior, while the other looks at how those beliefs show up in health care, follow-through and long-term well-being.

The Weight of Our Thoughts

PSYCHOTHERAPIST PERSPECTIVE:

Internalized weight bias is made up of negative thoughts, beliefs and behaviors we turn inward because of weight. From a psychotherapist's perspective, it often shows up in how people talk to themselves. These inner messages quietly shape how we interact with health care, school, work, media and relationships. Most of all, they shape the way we speak to ourselves each day.

In therapy, it is common to see how one small thought can set off a chain reaction. A simple "I can't" may turn into "I don't," "I won't," "I haven't," and eventually "I don't care." This spiral can feel overwhelming and may stop people from taking steps toward their health goals.

Resilience helps interrupt that pattern. In therapy, resilience means learning to gently redirect thoughts toward what you want, even when things feel hard. It is a shift toward a different inner story, one based on effort and intention instead of judgment. Thoughts like "I am doing my best," "I am taking steps," or "I can move forward in my own way" can help create that shift.

Psychotherapy gives people space to explore what drives their choices and the pressures that shape daily life. When these inner conversations are brought into the open, they can be reshaped into something more supportive and kind.

Understanding Internalized Weight Bias: How It Shows Up

PSYCHOTHERAPIST PERSPECTIVE:

Internalized weight bias often develops quietly. It can sound like a harsh inner voice, show up as pulling away from activities, or appear as constant comparison with others. Sometimes it is subtle, like skipping social events, avoiding mirrors, or worrying about what others might think about your body.

Over time, these patterns can become automatic. Some people avoid medical appointments because they expect stigma. Others speak to themselves in ways they would never speak to a friend. Replaying perceived flaws again and again can shape how people see themselves and make those thoughts feel like facts.

The first step toward change is awareness without judgment. This means noticing when the inner critic shows up, naming it, and gently redirecting your thoughts instead of criticizing yourself for having them.



Tip: Soften Your Inner Voice

When a harsh thought shows up, pause and ask yourself a few simple questions. Would I say this to someone I love? Is this thought helping me move toward my goals? What is a kinder and more realistic way to say this to myself?

Another helpful strategy is to separate yourself from the inner critic. Giving it a name or thinking of it as a separate voice can create distance and compassion instead of judgment. For example, saying “That perfectionist voice is back” can feel more helpful than saying “I’m such a failure.”

Neutral language can help too. Instead of “I’m undisciplined,” try “I noticed I did not follow through today.” This small shift makes space for problem-solving rather than shame.



Tip: Talk to Yourself Like a Trusted Friend

Imagine this situation happening to someone you deeply care about. The tone you would use with them, honest and kind, is the tone your inner voice deserves. When we judge ourselves less harshly, the hold of internalized weight bias begins to ease. This approach does not ignore challenges. It helps create an inner space that supports growth.



“Internalized weight bias often shows up most clearly in the way people talk to themselves.”





Use Whole Health Indicators, Not Just the Scale

The scale is only one way to measure health and it does not tell the full story. Many meaningful changes can happen even when weight stays the same.

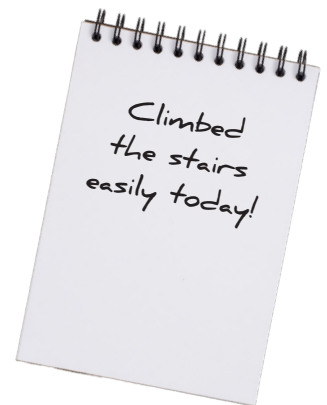
Look for progress such as:

- Moving more easily
- Having more energy during daily activities
- Sleeping better
- Improved blood pressure, blood sugar or lab results
- Needing less medication or more stable doses
- Less digestive discomfort
- Feeling more comfortable at medical appointments
- Changes in how clothes fit, used as neutral information

The number on the scale can change because of hydration, hormones, medication and time of day. Looking at physical, medical and emotional changes gives a more accurate picture of health.

Track Non-scale Wins

Write down small changes, such as climbing stairs with less effort or cooking a nourishing meal. When progress is measured in more than one way, follow-ups feel less intimidating and staying engaged with care becomes easier.



Shifting from Inner Dialogue to Healthcare Experiences

Internalized weight bias does not stop at thoughts and emotions. It also affects how people experience medical care. The next section shifts to a nurse's perspective, focusing on how these beliefs influence appointments, follow-through and how progress is measured.

NURSE PERSPECTIVE:

From a nursing perspective, internalized weight bias affects both emotional well-being and medical outcomes. Some patients skip follow-ups because of shame. Others view setbacks as personal failures rather than part of a learning process. Many people minimize or dismiss meaningful progress simply because it does not match a specific number on the scale. The scale is only one tool and tells just a fraction of the story. When that number becomes the sole focus, important signs of improved health and resilience may be overlooked.

Internalized bias can quietly interfere with treatment adherence, physical healing and the willingness to seek support. Recognizing this is not about blame. It is about creating space for compassionate and effective care, which includes broadening how success is measured.

Rewriting the Narrative

NURSE PERSPECTIVE:

Missed check-ins and plan changes are common and expected in health care. Life happens, and care plans are meant to be flexible, not perfect. Waiting for the perfect moment to restart often increases stress and delay.

If a goal no longer fits daily life, that does not mean failure. It means the plan needs to change. Open communication with a provider allows adjustments that better match energy, schedule and needs. Progress comes from ongoing communication and small course corrections, not from rigid plans.

Resilience as a Health Tool

PSYCHOTHERAPIST PERSPECTIVE:

In therapy, mistakes are treated as information, not as personal failure. When missteps are expected and talked about openly, they lose the power to define someone. Resilience means learning from what did not work instead of judging yourself for it. A thought like “I had a hard day, but I can try again tomorrow” helps people stay engaged rather than give up.

NURSE PERSPECTIVE:

In medical care, resilience shows up as flexibility and follow-through. Health goals should be realistic and compassionate. When setbacks occur, such as missed meals, unplanned indulgences, skipped activity or plateaus, resilience means adjusting rather than abandoning care.



Three Simple Ways to Practice Resilience Today

- Reframe one thought. Change “I can’t” to “I’m learning to.”
- Celebrate one healthy action, no matter how small.
- Write one kind sentence to yourself.

Bringing Both Perspectives Together

Lasting change happens when emotional and physical health are supported together. Therapy helps shift inner dialogue, while nursing care helps adjust plans and recognize progress. When these approaches work side by side, resilience becomes easier to build and sustain.

Internalized weight bias does not disappear overnight, but change begins by noticing how we speak to ourselves. Our thoughts shape our actions, and our actions shape our future. Choosing a kinder inner voice allows us to move forward with care, intention and self-respect.

About the Authors:

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ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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