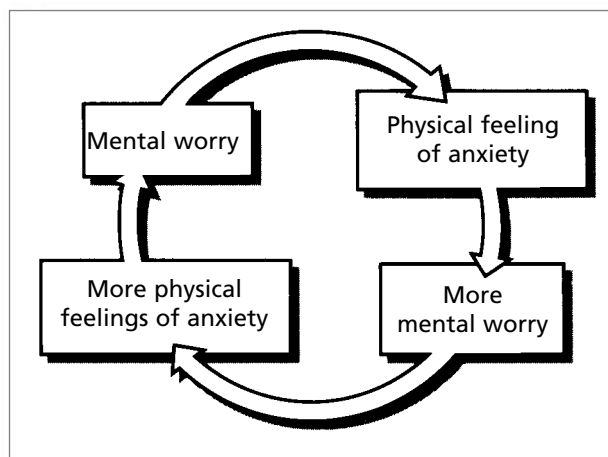


## ■ What is positive self-talk?

Worrying thoughts can make us feel physically anxious (heart racing, muscle tension etc), which then leads to us worrying more. ('Here we go again, I'm going to panic'.) A vicious circle soon gets established, running faster and faster under its own momentum.



Sometimes we are aware of these thoughts but often we are not. They may take the form of fleeting images or half-formed pictures in our minds. The thoughts tend to flash by automatically and very quickly.

An example may help to make this clearer. Imagine you are running upstairs when you feel a sudden sharp pain in the chest. It gives you a fright, and the thought goes through your head, 'Maybe there's something wrong with my heart'. The thought itself makes you more afraid, your heart beats faster, and the pain seems to take a long time to die away. Later on that day the same thought comes back to you. Once again your heartbeat increases and you feel afraid. The symptoms produced the thought, which made you anxious and added to the symptoms.

Positive self-talk is a copying strategy which involves breaking this vicious circle where negative thoughts lead to increased symptoms. It involves a number of stages.

## ■ How to practise positive self-talk

- ① **Find out exactly what you are thinking:** This is not always easy, as thoughts tend to flash through our minds so quickly and automatically that we are not always aware of them. Try writing these thoughts down on a diary sheet. Although it sounds strange, 'think about what you are thinking', or deliberately become 'mindful'.
- ② **Challenge the thoughts for how rational they are:** Research suggests that when people are under stress their thinking can often get distorted. Question your thoughts. Are you exaggerating? Are you thinking in all-or-nothing terms? Are you ignoring the positive?
- ③ **Replace negative thoughts with positive ones:** After you have challenged your existing thoughts, rewrite them in a more positive realistic language. Straighten out those distorted thoughts. It is sometimes useful to carry these positive challenges around with you on an index card.