



What are cognitive biases and tips to improve your thinking

Last Updated : 06 September 2023

In today's information age, our ability to make informed decisions is crucial, especially when it comes to nutrition and health. To make sense of the huge amount of information that surrounds us, our brains sometimes make systematic thinking errors - known as cognitive biases. This infographic explores seven common cognitive biases (confirmation bias, health halo effect, negativity bias, bandwagon effect, anchoring bias, false-cause effect, and the Dunning-Kruger effect) and includes tips to help you overcome them so that you can make more informed decisions.

WHAT ARE COGNITIVE BIASES AND TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR THINKING



What are cognitive biases?

Systematic thinking errors that happen when we process information. They are a result of our brains trying to make sense of the huge amount of information that surrounds us to help us make quick decisions.

Experiencing cognitive biases is common when we scroll online and don't always take the time to think critically about what we read.



Why is it a problem?



If we interpret information inaccurately it can lead us to make decisions that are not based on accurate data.



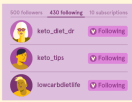
Cognitive biases are often unconscious, so we don't usually notice them. By being aware of them, we can challenge our own thinking and make better decisions.

7 common cognitive biases

1. Confirmation bias

Definition: the tendency to look for or cherry-pick information that confirms our existing beliefs over information that challenges them.

Example: only follow people on social media whose opinions are in line with our own, uncritically dismissing information from others.



2. (Health) halo effect

Definition: the perception that something is good for you even when there is little or no evidence to confirm this is true.

Example: when products are labelled "natural", "organic" or "gluten-free", we may perceive them as healthy even though their nutritional value may not be as good as we think.



3. Negativity bias

Definition: the tendency to pay more attention to negative information than positive information.

Example: focusing on the potential risk of very low pesticide exposure while ignoring the proven health benefits of fruit and vegetables.



4. Bandwagon effect

Definition: the tendency to think or act a certain way primarily because others are doing it.

Example: following a fat diet that is not nutritionally balanced for sustainable because it is trending on social media.



5. Anchoring bias

Definition: the tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information we receive on a topic.

Example: if you first see a soda that is high in sugar - then see a second one that is slightly lower in sugar - you're prone to see this soda as healthier, even though it is still high in sugar.



6. False-cause effect

Definition: the tendency to falsely assume that one thing causes something else because we've noticed a relationship between them.

Example: attributing weight loss to cutting out carbohydrates from your diet when actually you lost weight by creating a calorie deficit in your overall diet.



7. Dunning-Kruger effect

Definition: when people overestimate their expertise in a particular field, often due to an inability to recognize their own lack of skills or knowledge.

Example: social media influencers with no qualifications in nutrition and health offering advice on food and diet.



Tips to beat your own biases

- 1. Be aware**
learning about how biases influence our thinking can help us reduce their effects.
- 2. Be curious**
ask questions and try to understand the opposite point of view.
- 3. Look at multiple perspectives**
speak to different people and try to identify any blind spots in your own knowledge before making decisions.
- 4. Check credentials**
take a look at people's qualifications before deciding whether to trust what they say on a topic.
- 5. Challenge your own opinions**
ensure you don't ignore any information or put too much weight on the wrong thing.