



Rumination is not all bad

At the end of the day, spending time thinking about issues or ideas is not always unhealthy. In some cases, ruminating with a friend [can foster a closer bond](#), or perhaps it can prompt you to leave a stressful job or confront a bad friend. There's potentially a lot of sort of secondary gain that can come from rumination, depending on how you use it.

What matters most when it comes to rumination is how your thinking makes you feel. If your thoughts are causing distress, anger or anxiety, or if your rumination is pulling you away from important things in your life, that is when it's a problem.

More information

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How to Stop Ruminating



“Thinking and worrying are normal parts of life, learn to manage them”

Stuck in a mental loop of worries and problems that seem to have no end? Here's what you can do.

First, identify if you actually have a problem

Thinking and worrying are normal parts of life. Everyone has the capacity to overthink – but a sign of trouble is if your thoughts become so persistent that they're like “a car without brakes,”.

If you realize, “I don't want to be thinking about this, but I feel like I can't stop,” that's when you know your thinking is compulsive and is considered rumination.

Another potential sign of rumination is if you're overthinking issues that lack a solution. Replaying an awkward conversation from a party in your head can be normal. But if you can't stop the loop to the point where you're distracted from important things you need to do, that's problematic – especially because your thinking won't change any outcomes from the past.

Certain people are more likely to ruminate than others. Women [tend to ruminate more than men](#), as do people prone to [perfectionism or insecurity](#). Rumination is also common among people with certain health issues.

Rumination also tends to occur alongside many mental health conditions including [O.C.D.](#), [anxiety](#), [depression](#) and [bipolar disorder](#). People with depression who ruminate also tend to experience [worse depression, and for longer](#).

How to break the rumination cycle

The experts said that if your rumination is on the milder side – meaning you're stuck in a stream of thoughts, but it's not so distressing or constant that it feels intolerable – certain simple strategies might help.

Divert your attention. One of the most effective things you can do when your thoughts are spiraling out of control is to distract yourself.

Listening to music and focusing intently on the words or tune” can also help break you out of your thoughts – at least temporarily. Other diversion tactics like talking with a friend, playing a game or exercising can also help.

Avoid your triggers. If watching a Hallmark movie brings up overwhelming memories of the loss of a family member, or if scrolling through social media leads to an unhealthy fixation on your appearance, avoiding those triggers can help interrupt such thoughts. Use the “mute,” “block,” “unfollow” or “not interested” functions on social media liberally, or avoid the internet or certain types of media altogether if you find that they're doing more harm than good.

Set a worry timer. When you're ruminating, it's possible to get stuck in a feedback loop where you feel bad about ruminating, which itself can lead to more rumination and deepened feelings of distress. Setting aside 10 to 30 minutes of dedicated “worry or rumination time” periodically can help relieve that pressure. Even the simple act of giving yourself permission to ruminate can help you to feel more relaxed. At the end it can become a positive feedback loop.

Immerse yourself in the moment. Sometimes people ruminate about things that happened in the past or that will happen in the future, and which have no immediate solutions. To get yourself out of that unproductive thought pattern, take a moment to notice everything that is happening around you, such as: “What do you see in front of you? What's the temperature in the room? Is there anything that you can smell in the air? Take whatever experience you're in and completely immerse yourself.”

Serious rumination might need therapy

While the strategies mentioned may be helpful for some people, those who ruminate and also have certain mental illnesses (such as severe O.C.D.) will need more regimented intervention. If your rumination gets to a near-constant state, it would be unrealistic for you to try to be distracted or mindful all the time, like constantly trying to swat at a fly or hold a balloon underwater.

When you tell yourself that you do not need to resolve the issue, and you believe that it's OK to refrain from trying to find a solution, that's often when your brain can let go. It should feel like a release. You don't need to visualize anything, you don't need to do anything, “you just stop engaging.” While that may sound like a confusing directive, it is something anyone can learn, he said, usually with a bit of practice.

Therapies for conditions like O.C.D., anxiety and certain types of depression – which can include cognitive behavioral therapy, antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, [light therapy](#) or writing out your feelings – are all useful in reducing rumination.

