

ABOUT RUMINATION

Rumination involves repetitive and passive thoughts focused on the causes and effects of one's distress. Rumination represents negative thought patterns that are immersive and repetitive. Many people slip into rumination when trying to process their emotions, but they become "stuck" in negative patterns of replaying past scenarios without moving toward solutions.

What distinguishes rumination or "dwelling on problems" from productive emotional processing is that rumination does not generate new ways of thinking, new behaviors, or new possibilities. Ruminative thinkers repeatedly go over the same information without change and stay in a negative mindset.

"RUMINATIVE THINKERS REPEATEDLY GO OVER THE SAME INFORMATION WITHOUT CHANGE AND STAY IN A NEGATIVE MINDSET".

Rumination tends to have a more negative bias, often including thought patterns that involve pessimism and cognitive distortions focusing on the negative aspects of a situation.

While people are prone to rumination during stressful times, repetitive thoughts eventually amplify stress and create additional problems—including many negative effects on the mind and body.

The following can be indicators that you have fallen into the trap of rumination:

- Focusing on a problem for more than a few idle minutes.
- Feeling worse than you started out feeling.
- No movement toward accepting and moving on.
- No closer to a viable solution.
- If you repeatedly find yourself saying "I just don't understand why this happened to me".

Rumination can even be "contagious" in a way. Two people can engage in "co-rumination" and keep a negative situation alive between them with little movement toward the positive. This can occur with friends, family, or even in therapy.

Rumination vs Processing

One of the unique aspects of being human is our capacity to solve problems. The human brain is wired to solve problems, so it makes sense that we would expend mental energy trying to "figure out" solutions. But sometimes, our brains mislead us.

Rumination and emotional processing both focus on problems, but processing and ruminating are different things and learning how to distinguish between the two can be important for your mental well-being.

Examining memories, situations, and feelings can be an important part of processing our experiences. Emotional processing leads to acceptance and release of negative emotions whereas rumination keeps you "stuck".

"EMOTIONAL PROCESSING LEADS TO ACCEPTANCE AND RELEASE OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS WHEREAS RUMINATION KEEPS YOU "STUCK".

RUMINATION	PROCESSING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often leads to self-blame, guilt, or shame. Does not produce solutions or insights. Can lead to blaming others. Focuses on the negative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Leads to feelings of acceptance. ✓ Produces solutions and insights. ✓ Allows people to put situations in perspective. ✓ Helps people look for the positive.

By now, you might be asking any of the following questions:

- If we don't think about our problems, how can we solve them or learn from the process?
- Should we just focus only on the positive?
- Don't we sacrifice growth and solutions if we don't focus on solving problems from time to time?

These are important questions. Finding the happy median between ignoring problems and engaging in rumination can save us a lot of stress.

What causes rumination?

It is normal to ruminate on things from time to time, particularly if you are thinking about a stressful or upsetting experience. People may ruminate because they believe they can solve a problem or gain insight by thinking about it repeatedly .

Factors that might cause rumination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certain personality traits such as perfectionism or neuroticism. Stressful events such as job loss or a relationship break up. Poor self-esteem.

- Stressing about something you fear.
- Traumatic experiences.
- Worrying about upcoming events like a work presentation or exam.
- Worrying about a health condition.

Rumination is also associated with several different mental health conditions. These conditions can contribute to rumination, but experiencing these repetitive thoughts can also contribute to, or worsen, the symptoms of these conditions.

Mental conditions that can cause rumination or be worsened by it	
Anxiety Disorders Generalized Anxiety Disorder Social Anxiety Disorder Illness Anxiety Disorder Panic Disorder	Anxiety is often marked by worrying or ruminating over specific fears or anticipated situations. Research has shown that rumination is a risk factor for anxiety.
Mood Disorders Depression Dysthymia Bipolar Disorder	Depression can cause people to ruminate over negative thoughts. Numerous studies have linked rumination as a significant risk factor for the onset of depression. Research suggests that rumination can be a maladaptive way of responding to a depressed mood, leading to more feelings of depression.
Eating Disorders Anorexia Nervosa Bulimia Nervosa Binge-Eating Disorder	Eating disorders can cause people to ruminate about food, dieting, and exercising. Research has found that people who exhibit eating disorder psychopathology are more likely to experience ruminating thoughts, and such thoughts tend to decrease mood and cause more negative body-related thoughts.
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and Related Disorders	Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) causes intrusive, obsessive thoughts that may lead to compulsive behaviors to relieve distress. Rumination could be viewed as a type of compulsion . One study found that rumination plays a role in maintaining OCD symptoms that can also contribute to depressed mood.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often involves ruminating about traumatic memories. Researchers believe that rumination may be an intentional way to understand and process the trauma, although the results are ultimately ineffective.

Ending Rumination is an ACTIVE process

Most people don't set out to ruminate over their problems. Most of us want to be happy and want to focus on thoughts that make us happy. The problem occurs when something frustrating, threatening, or insulting happens to us—something that is difficult to accept—and we can't let it be.

We may be trying to make sense of it in our mind, attempting to learn from it, or we may just be seeking validation that this should not have happened. Whatever the reason, we can't stop thinking about it, and when we think about it, we become upset.

The unproductive and negative focus of our thinking is the defining aspect of rumination that differentiates it from regular problem-solving. Rumination may involve going over the details of a situation in one's head or talking to friends about it. Rumination can be difficult to give up, especially if you don't recognize it as rumination or don't know how to stop. Letting go of stress and anger can help with ruminative thinking. Properly dealing with negative emotions can also help with rumination and the feelings of stress that come with it.

Taking a passive approach to tackling ruminations or obsessions DOES NOT WORK. It requires active intervention. If you find yourself saying "I hope one day I won't ruminate as much or be so negative", then you are taking a passive stance. An active stance would be "I am going to work at reducing the amount of rumination I engage in by practicing techniques that will help me gain healthy control over my thought process".

The next section provides a few simple tips and tricks for reducing rumination.

A.D.D. FOR RUMINATIONS AND OBSESSIONS

A.D.D. for ruminations and obsessions is a behavioral therapy strategy adapted from a self-directed treatment program for obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) developed by Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz and colleagues at UCLA. Rumination can be conceptualized as a type of compulsive mental act in which we repeatedly overanalyze scenarios in hopes of finding some resolve. Often, the result is more negativity, shame, guilt, and frustration .

A **Admit and Accept**

Admit and accept that you are ruminating or obsessing. Point it out to yourself .

D **Detach**

Detach from the rumination process by labeling your rumination as a problem within your brain. Obsessions and ruminations are a brain wiring problem. We do not have control over what thoughts pop up. That is, we are not responsible for our thoughts. We are also not our thoughts. We EXPERIENCE thoughts. By detaching from your thoughts and labeling the rumination process (or obsessive thoughts) as a brain problem, you put space between you and the rumination process. Say to yourself“ That’s not me, that’s my brain”

D **Direct your attention away**

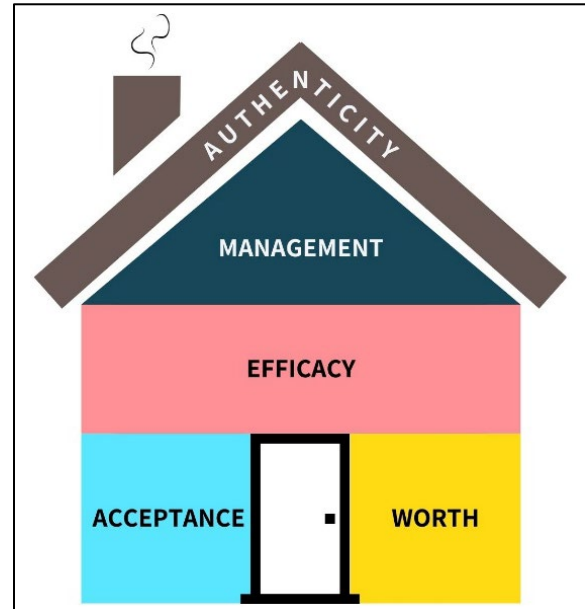
Shift your attention away from your current thoughts. Do something different. Engage in a completely different behavior. Ruminating and obsessing are like the gearshift of a car getting“ stuck ”in gear. In fact, brain imaging studies have demonstrated that specific areas of the brain become“ locked ”together during obsessive thinking. By forcing yourself to do something different, you slowly learn to“ lubricate ”the gears. Interestingly, when individuals practiced this technique, noticeable changes were represented in their brains on neuroimaging! Below is a list of healthy and unhealthy distractions .

Healthy Distractions	
Meditation	Meditation can help relieve feelings of stress and redirect thoughts toward less negative patterns.
Enjoying hobbies	Doing a puzzle, reading a book, listening to music, or watching a movie.
Exercising	Physical activity can be a great way to distract from negative thoughts, but research has also found that it can significantly reduce rumination in people with a mental health diagnosis.
Spending time outside	Research has also found that spending time in nature can significantly reduce rumination. ⁹ Try combining exercise and nature exposure by walking in a park or natural setting.
Spending time with supportive friends and family	Calling or texting a supportive friend or making plans to spend time with supportive friends can be a great way to get out of your head. Even if ruminations continue while in a social setting, that is much better than being alone with your negative thoughts .
Challenging your thoughts	Remind yourself that thoughts are not facts. Instead of accepting a negative thought as reality, actively challenge it and look for alternative explanations.
Helping others	When we ruminate, we are hyper-reflective on ourselves. By helping others (e.g., volunteer service, caring for an animal, etc.), we shift our attention away from ourselves which can reduce ruminations .
Unhealthy Distractions	
Social Media	It is also important to avoid or minimize contact with things that trigger rumination. For example, if scrolling through your social media feeds leaves you with negative thoughts about your life, relationships, or appearance, consider unfollowing accounts that lead to these negative thoughts and feelings.
Drugs (alcohol, cannabis)	
Compulsive behaviors	Binge-eating, purging, hoarding, checking, etc .
Self-harm behaviors	Cutting, burning, scratching, biting, etc .

A HEALTHY SELF

A healthy sense of self means having a balanced and realistic understanding of who you are. It involves knowing and accepting your strengths and weaknesses, being comfortable in your own skin, and having confidence in your ability to handle challenges without excessive self-doubt or arrogance. It means valuing yourself as inherently worthy, regardless of external achievements or validation from others. A person with a healthy sense of self can set boundaries, maintain relationships without losing their individuality, and make decisions that align with their true values and needs. In essence, it's about being grounded in who you are while staying open to growth and change.

The house represents the core components of a healthy self. It is important to note that other components exist, but the house represents the core components.



CORE COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY SELF

SELF-ACCEPTANCE	Acknowledging and accepting all favorable and unfavorable aspects of yourself with curiosity, compassion, forgiveness and patience.
SELF-WORTH	Maintaining a core belief that you are deserving of love, respect, and kindness for being yourself. Appreciating your worth as being independent of external achievements, validation, or other people's opinions. Seeing challenges and setbacks as opportunities for learning rather than threats to your worth or character.
SELF-EFFICACY	Trusting that you can handle challenges, achieve goals, and adapt to different situations. The ability to recover from difficulties, learn from mistakes, and remain open to change. Holding yourself accountable by accepting responsibility for your actions and choices.
SELF-MANAGEMENT	Being in tune with your thoughts, emotions, motivations, and behaviors. Recognizing and processing emotions without being consumed by them. Choosing responses that align with your beliefs and values rather than reacting impulsively.
AUTHENTICITY	Aligning your actions and decisions with your beliefs and values rather than the beliefs, values, or expectations of others. Knowing when to say 'no' and setting limits to ensure your needs are respected. Having a balanced and realistic understanding of who you are by seeing yourself in a balanced way, recognizing both your strengths and areas for growth and not viewing yourself as all-good or all-bad. Maintaining relationships that foster mutual respect and trust. The ability to learn on others without losing your independence.

START RECOGNIZING AND STOP IGNORING YOUR INNER CRITIC

Almost everyone must deal with the “inner critic” a few times throughout their lives. If you’ve been dealing with that inner critic lately, research suggests accepting the thoughts rather than trying to ignore them (since that can just cause the thoughts to persist), recognizing the thoughts for what they are and then identifying them as being messages from that inner critic. This can take practice but can ultimately help you create space between those critical thoughts and what is true.

Try to reframe the voice of the inner-critic to a more self-compassionate voice (even if it feels forced).

Unfortunately, when our self-esteem is low, we are likely to damage it even further by being self-critical. Since our goal is to enhance our self-esteem, we need to substitute self-criticism (which is almost always useless) with self-compassion.

Self-compassion can be key to helping you feel better about yourself. Speak back to those negative thoughts with kinder, more compassionate statements. Changing your inner dialogue can shift your mindset over time so your brain will begin to recognize that you’re more capable and competent than you give yourself credit for.

Below is an example of how to positively reframe a critical thought:

- **CRITICAL THOUGHT:** “I was so stupid for speaking up in that meeting today!”
- **THOUGHT REFRAMED:** “Even though I didn’t feel great about what I said in the meeting, it was an important learning experience for me for future meetings.”

***PRO TIP:** What would you say to a dear friend who was thinking or saying these things to themselves?*

When you catch yourself being overly critical or making negative predictions about your chances of success, stop and ask, “What would I say to a friend who was thinking this?” Chances are, you’d likely offer some compassionate words of encouragement. It’s much easier to be kind to others than it is to be kind to ourselves.