

How slow can you go?

Learning Center

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Reduce Ruminating Thought

In recent years, the term **rumination** has entered our everyday lexicon. As defined by psychology it is a, "Cognitive process that involves repeated dwelling on negative thoughts and experiences." The same process can be defined as, "Obsessing." For example, experiencing an embarrassing incident is an unpleasant experience, and if that isn't bad enough, we often keep thinking (or ruminating) about the incident long after it happens. When you obsessively think about a negative situation and find that you can't stop, it will likely make you feel worse. That's how rumination can transform a minor or trivial mistake into a major catastrophe.

Here are some things that may lead to rumination:

- Stressors (e.g., getting a bad grade, a poor work review)
- A traumatic event (e.g., grief, divorce)
- Perfectionism

Types of Rumination

Ruminative thoughts are obsessive and can be divided into two subtypes: **reflective** and **brooding**. The reflective component refers to a cycle of thinking that is analytical and focuses on problem-solving, which is the healthier subtype, whereas brooding involves, "a passive comparison of one's current situation with some unachieved standard." (Treynor et al., 2003, p. 256) **Brooding** can lead to negative self-talk and mental health issues such as substance abuse, depression, and anxiety. The key difference between reflection and brooding is that reflection involves thinking about actions aimed at changing the situation or relieving distress, making it more adaptive.

Tips to Halt Ruminating

Gratitude

Research suggests that expressing gratitude is inversely linked to rumination (Liang et al., 2018). The practice of gratitude may help you be more appreciative of all the good things in your life. Need to start a gratitude practice? It's as simple as listing three things you're grateful for every morning. By starting your day thinking positively, you arm yourself against negative and intrusive thoughts.

Body Awareness

Body awareness can help us shift our attention to the present moment, which can help reduce rumination. When you find yourself ruminating, try doing a quick body scan. Notice the different parts of your body and physical sensations. Let this ground you in the present moment as your thoughts begin to dissolve into the background. Combined with a deep breathing exercise, you can release the past and settle into the present.

Meditation

People who have a consistent and long-term meditation practice are less likely to report rumination and symptoms of depression (Hemo & Lev-Ari, 2015). Meditating can be a helpful practice for combating rumination by improving emotional awareness, becoming present in the moment, reducing focus on the self, and building self-compassion.

Reduce Focus on the Self

Psychology research shows that paying too much attention to the self can play a powerful role in mental illness. What thoughts do you normally have when you're ruminating? It's likely that a lot of your obsessive thoughts are centered on you (i.e., your situation, your emotions, your relationships, etc). Shifting your focus to others can help alter this pattern.

Practice Self-Compassion

People who ruminate often criticize themselves and have low self-esteem. To alleviate this, it's helpful to practice self-compassion. In fact, people who practice self-compassion are less likely to ruminate and have depression (Svendsen, 2017). Compassion can also help reduce self-focus by connecting us with others. Not sure how to treat yourself with compassion. Forgive yourself for mistakes. Treat yourself with the same kindness you would extend to a friend or loved-one in the same situation you find yourself in.

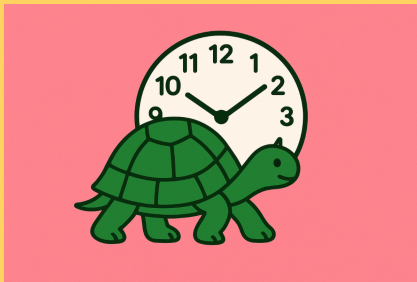
In Conclusion

If you struggle with ruminative thoughts, getting stuck in cycles of negative thinking, or just overthinking in general, try out some of the tips

negative thinking, or just overthinking in general, try out some of the tips above and see if they help you. Making an effort to stop ruminative cycles is the first step. In time, you can build the skills that slow down and diminish the negative effects of rumination.

References

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Aging is a process. One that can be slowed to a crawl.

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