

Breaking Free of Anxiety, Part V, Managing Worry and Rumination

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Most people don't realize that thinking can be hazardous to your health. It is estimated the average adult has 60,000-70,000 thoughts per day. The mind is consistently thinking, analyzing, and creating. Furthermore, whatever we focus on, we amplify. This is why worry and rumination is at the heart of all anxiety.

Rumination is a term used to refer to the experience of spinning "round and round" in one's thoughts. All rumination is fear based, and because what we focus on, we amplify, rumination can quickly elevate fear to the level of panic and anxiety. One therapeutic goal is to learn how to relax and slow down the mind. This allows the opportunity to learn how to transform worry and rumination into effective problem-solving.

Good problem-solving is all about developing good discrimination strategies that allow you to make healthy choices regarding issues which confront you. The ability to problem-solve and make healthy choices is dramatically reduced as anxiety elevates. Many anxiety sufferers fall into the false belief that their worry and rumination is effective problem-solving. They can even come to believe that their worry and rumination is an essential part of coping effectively with the stressors of life. The idea of letting go of rumination and worry is not only foreign to them, but can be downright threatening.

One specific form of rumination is often referred to as "analysis paralysis." This is a term used to describe the tendency to analyze every detail of a situation endlessly, making it impossible to make a decision. The need to analyze becomes so overwhelming, they cannot make any decision at all. After all, there is always some other perspective to be considered. The fear of making a mistake leads to an inability to take any action at all.

To break free of worry and anxiety, the first discrimination to be made, is between effective problem-solving and useless worry, rumination, and analysis. How do you know when your thinking is useful problem-solving versus useless rumination? The answer is: If your thinking does not lead to a specific course of action within a timely fashion, then it is rumination. The ruminator needs to begin to ask himself "What do I need to do?" versus "Why is this happening to me?"

There is a danger in thinking too much! Worry and rumination is not only unproductive, it can create anxiety and generate physiological stress in the body. Constant rumination reduces the efficiency of the immune system. This leads to greater susceptibility to illness, as well as anxiety and panic. This is why learning to quiet the mind should be one of the first therapeutic goals addressed when learning to break free of anxiety and panic.