

Are you a ruminating thinker?

Written by By Melissa Martin Guest Columnist
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Like a dog chasing its own tail—around and around and around—some individuals can relate to the anxiety loop. They feel anxious. Soon they feel anxious about feeling anxious, which causes even more anxiety. Are you a chronic worrier? A ruminating ruminator? An obsessive thinker?

The brain becomes stuck in the chronic worry zone. The body responds with symptoms of distress: stomach upset, constipation or diarrhea, restlessness, insomnia, irritability. Panic attacks may be experienced in crowded places: shaking, sweating, dizziness, breathing rapidly, and pounding heart. Get me out of here!

Stress, pressure, worry, anxiety, panic. The learning process starts with understanding that stress is caused, not by other people or external events, but by our reactions to them. Really? Yes. We do live in an environment and this environment affects us, but why and how do we react and respond to things that happen at home, at work, and in our community?

In a 2017 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, Nicholas Petrie asserted that pressure does not have to turn into stress. And the culprit is rumination. “Pressure is not stress. But the former is converted to the latter when you add one ingredient: rumination, the tendency to keep rethinking past or future events, while attaching negative emotion to those thoughts. ... Rumination is ongoing and destructive, diminishing your health, productivity, and well-being. Chronic worriers show increased incidence of coronary problems and suppressed immune functioning. Dwelling on the past or the future also takes us away from the present, rendering us

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unable to complete the work currently on our plates.”

Are you a ruminating Ralph? Are you a ruminating Rita? Do obsessive thoughts get stuck in your brain like a blender buzzing around and around and around? Ruminators need to know how to stop their thought cycle, before it spirals out of control.

According to the American Psychological Association, some common reasons for rumination include: a belief they're gaining insight by excessive worrying; having a history of trauma; believing they face uncontrollable stressors; and personality characteristics such as perfectionism or neuroticism.

And repeated feelings about problems can cause and maintain depression. Rumination can increase a negative mood and intensify symptoms of depression. Dwelling on dilemmas exhausts brain energy. Will rumination solve the problem?

How do you stay out of the blender? How do you turn the blender off? The power to prevent chronic worrying and to intervene when anxiety-provoking thoughts swirl and twirl is between your ears—the brain. The human mind manages what happens inside the brain tissue.

Tips to stop rumination

Identify your biggest fear. Often, the emotion underneath anxiety is fear and sometimes it's a fear of losing something. Are you afraid of losing a relationship, a job, an important goal? The unknown can be scarier than reality. After you identify your fear, ask a question. Is it changeable or not changeable?

Identify your triggers. What people, places, or things cause obsessive worrying? Do you need to avoid or confront?

Interrupt the ruminative thought process with distraction: talk to a friend, take a walk, or

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participate in an activity. Pull the plug on anxiety-provoking thoughts by listening to music or reading a book. Shift your attention. Physically get up and engage in something else. What are you missing out on by the time spent ruminating?

Has rumination become a habit? Write out a plan with goals, objectives, and activities to kick the worry cycle to the curb. "Rumination, I'm breaking up with you. Obsessive worry, you are not welcome in my brain." Get out of your head by interrupting the mental loop of negative thinking. Change your perspective. How you think about the problem is not solving the problem. So tap into the logical part of your brain.

Emotions are part of the human hardware. Just because you feel it, doesn't make it so. Feelings can be fickle. Uplift your mood with prayer or meditation. Or watch a funny video and laugh.

Are you worrying about past mistakes or making future mistakes? Do you overanalyze situations and conversations? Does worry interrupt your sleep? If anxious and ruminating thoughts are impairing your daily functioning, consider counseling. Cognitive behavioral therapy may be beneficial.

By Melissa Martin
Guest Columnist