

# Overthinking and Reflection

## *Mindful Habits for a Healthy Mind*

Have you ever wondered why you tend to overanalyze a past conversation or worry about the intimidating pile of student loans that you're going to have to pay back? The truth is that many of us feel these overwhelming stress factors because we are human, and while it's normal, it can be

unproductive when paired with decision-making, relationships, and our overall mental health. Evolutionarily, primitive human beings had to worry about survival, like feeding themselves and protecting themselves from predators (Pick Up Limes, 2021). But in the modern era, we tend to worry about more trivial matters, such as how we look, whether we are fulfilled by our work, and how long we will experience the losses and uncertainty of the COVID pandemic.



Without this kind of thinking, humankind would not have developed as a species to the extent that we are incredibly advanced. However, rumination is not helpful if it's focused on things out of our control or with little significance, and can potentially be harmful. According to Sara Sperber, "van Randenborgh and colleagues found that rumination negatively affected individuals' decision-making processes, with ruminating participants finding decisions more difficult and being less confident in their decisions" (Sperber). Overthinking also pairs badly with anxiety and depression, and can impair our ability to get a good night's sleep (Sperber).



Overthinking is a bad habit that can be addressed if we are willing to make the necessary changes. Mental health experts have developed practices that we can take when we are feeling overwhelmed, worried, or uncertain that have been proven to bring us back to the present. Amy Morin LCSW, a licensed clinical social worker and psychotherapist, recommends six ways that we can break negative thinking patterns.

The first step to solving any problem is to acknowledge it. This principle also applies to rumination and worry, as awareness of our bad habits allows us to conclude that we are being "exaggeratedly negative" (Morin, 2016), leading us to make changes to our thinking patterns and stop ourselves from spiraling into a bad mindset. The third tip is to replace problem-dwelling with active problem-solving. "Instead of asking why something happened, ask yourself what you can do about it," (Morin, 2016) which is much more helpful than ruminating on what you can't change or control. Another tip is to set 20 minutes aside each day specifically for your ponder. Morin advises:

**During this time, let yourself worry, ruminate, or mull over whatever you want. Then, when the time is up, move onto something more productive. When you notice yourself overthinking things outside of your scheduled time, remind yourself that you'll think about it later. (Morin, 2016).**



Mindfulness is important in this practice as well, since these changes are going to involve a deeper connection between your consciousness and your thoughts. Writing your feelings and emotions down in a journal or talking them out with a trusted family member or friend can help you to get those dampening thoughts out of your head, thus reducing the urgency of your worries (Pick Up Limes, 2021). Finally, redirecting your energy to something else, or as Morin calls “changing the channel”, can help to reduce overthinking. Activities like exercise, social engagement, or projects that have gotten pushed off due to procrastination refocuses our attention to something less daunting.



These are just some of the ways that we can avoid overthinking, and while they are very helpful, it takes time to develop these skills and alter your habits. The more you practice, the easier it gets.

Sources:

Pick Up Limes (2021, August 17). How to deal with overthinking & worrying. [Video]. Youtube. Pick Up Limes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYuMxWP-Wfo>

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By Olyvia Giordano

**USYF** UNITED STATES YOUTH FORUM

