

Avoiding Over thinking and Social Comparison - Activity Three:

Over thinking (or self-focused rumination) is thinking too much, needlessly, passively, endlessly and excessively pondering the meanings, causes and consequences of your character, your feelings, and your problems. “Why am I so unhappy?” “What will happen to me if I continue to procrastinate at work?” “What did he really mean by that remark?”

Many of us believe that when we feel down we should try to focus inwardly and evaluate our feelings and our situations in order to attain self-insight and find solutions that might ultimately resolve our problems and relieve our unhappiness. There is in fact a great deal of evidence to the contrary, over thinking sustains and worsens our sadness, fosters negativity, impairs a person’s ability to solve problems, saps motivation and interferes with concentration and initiative. Self rumination creates a distorted, pessimistic perspective of your life. The evidence that over thinking is bad for you is now overwhelming and vast. To be happier you need to break the habit of rumination or over thinking. This thinking is often obsessive and the key to your happiness is to break this habit. Truly happy people have the ability to distract and absorb themselves in activities that divert energies and attention away from dark or anxious rumination. Becoming happier means learning to disengage from over thinking about both minor and major negative experiences, learning to stop looking for all the leaks and cracks, not letting them affect how you feel about yourself and your life as a whole.

Social comparisons are common. We can’t help noticing whether our friends, co-workers, family members, and even fictional characters in movies are brighter, richer, healthier, wittier, or more attractive than we are. Sometimes these comparisons are useful as they push us to strive for goals. They can also make us feel better when we see others struggling as we are. Much of the time however we use upward comparisons, “he’s paid more”, “she’s thinner”. These may lead to feelings of inferiority, distress, and loss of self esteem, while downward comparisons may lead to feelings of guilt “Her cancer has spread”, “He got laid off”. The more social comparisons you make the more likely you are to encounter unfavorable comparisons and the more sensitive you are the more likely you are to suffer negative consequences.

Activity 1 – Cut Loose: Immediately stop over thinking and stop focusing on comparisons with others. Try distracting yourself by increasing activity that keeps you focused and does not allow over thinking or comparisons to enter your thoughts. Watch a funny movie. You could try the Stop or No technique. Each time you start over thinking or making comparisons you say Stop or No. Another strategy is to allow 20 minutes per week to ruminate and think about these things, get it off your chest. You could talk to a sympathetic and trusted friend, but be careful as this can be overwhelming to them. Lastly try writing your thoughts down, this will organize them better for you, allowing you to move on.

Activity 2 – Act to solve Problems: Try to solve the real, concrete problems that might inspire your over thinking

Activity 3 – Take in the Big Picture: Don’t sweat the small stuff. Ask yourself “will this matter in a year”, “will it matter on my deathbed” If it does, you make need to take action, if not move on