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How to Stop Overthinking and Manage Anxious Thoughts

Practical strategies for responding differently to repetitive thoughts



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How to Stop Overthinking and Manage Anxious Thoughts

Everyone overthinks from time to time. Persistent anxious thoughts can become exhausting and interfere with everyday life. The good news is that overthinking is a habit that can be changed.

What Is Overthinking?

Overthinking involves repetitive thoughts that do not lead to useful solutions. It may include replaying conversations, worrying about the future, imagining worst-case scenarios or constantly analysing decisions.

Why Do We Overthink?

Overthinking is often an attempt to feel prepared or prevent problems. Unfortunately, it usually increases anxiety, stress, self-doubt and mental exhaustion.

Recognise the Signs

You may be overthinking if you replay situations, second-guess yourself, struggle to switch off, find decisions difficult or frequently imagine the worst.

Ask Yourself: Is This Helpful?

Pause and ask whether your thoughts are helping solve the problem or simply increasing worry. Focus on facts rather than assumptions.

Focus on What You Can Control

Direct your attention towards one practical step you can take today instead of worrying about things beyond your control.

Practical Ways to Manage Anxious Thoughts

Changing overthinking patterns takes practice. These strategies can help you create distance from anxious thoughts and redirect your attention towards more useful responses.

Challenge Unhelpful Thoughts

Ask yourself what evidence supports your thoughts, what evidence doesn't, and whether there may be another explanation.

Limit 'What If?' Thinking

Replace 'What if everything goes wrong?' with more balanced questions such as 'What if things work out?' or 'How might I cope if something difficult happens?'

Return to the Present

Use grounding techniques by noticing what you can see, hear, feel, smell and taste to reconnect with the present moment.

Schedule Worry Time

Set aside 15–20 minutes each day for worrying. When worries arise outside that time, remind yourself you will return to them later.

Take Care of Your Body

Support your mental wellbeing through sleep, exercise, nutritious meals, limiting caffeine if needed and spending time outdoors.

Practise Self-Compassion

Speak to yourself with the same kindness you would offer a friend. Progress takes time and setbacks are normal.

When to Seek Professional Support

Consider counselling if overthinking affects your sleep, work, relationships or quality of life, or if anxiety feels difficult to manage alone.

A Simple Overthinking Reset

When you notice your thoughts beginning to spiral, use this short process to interrupt the pattern and bring your attention back to what is useful right now.

1. Notice	Recognise that you are caught in an overthinking loop.
2. Question	Ask: Is this thought based on facts, assumptions or fear?
3. Ground	Reconnect with the present using your senses or slow breathing.
4. Refocus	Identify one thing within your control and choose one practical next step.

Key Takeaways

- Recognise overthinking patterns.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Challenge anxious thoughts.
- Use grounding techniques.
- Look after your physical wellbeing.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Seek professional support if needed.

Professional online counselling for individuals and couples across Australia.

"You don't have to believe every thought that enters your mind. Learning to respond differently to anxious thinking can help you find greater calm, confidence and peace of mind."

Melbourne Counselling Centre