

BEWARE THE ACTIONS OF THE MIND!

If there were two things I could rid from the world, it would be rumination and worry. Many don't know the difference so I'll explain. Rumination is that debilitating internal monologue where we reconstruct old arguments and past decisions and imagine *what-ifs* or *should have dones* to weave useless versions of the past that just bring us down. Worry is a similar mental process, only it's usually directed at anticipating unlikely danger and planning ways to avoid or deal with it. So rumination puts your mind in the past, and worry in the uncertain future. However, both can be treated similarly, so read on!

As it is Mental Health Week, I want you to consider how much of your day is lost to these two thieves. When I ask my clients why they do them, they say they're trying to avoid danger, to understand the reasons for why things have happened to them, or to work out ways of dealing with disturbing thoughts and feelings. All too often they say that it makes them feel like they're doing something, helps them cope, or prepares them for the worst. These kinds of responses can sort of make sense, but then I ask them if it ever works, or if it ever makes them happy? Not one person has ever said, "Yes". They always say, it only ever makes them feel worse. So why do we do it, if it's not going to help us achieve our ultimate goal of being content, or even happy?

In the spirit of Mental Health Week, I want you to ask yourself the same question. How long have you been ruminating about your *problems* or worry about *unlikely* future events? Has it solved any of these yet? How much longer do you think it will take?

I'd like to teach a simple technique to get off the worry and rumination wheel, and get more in the present, where things might not be perfect, but they're ok. This technique will allow you to break the link between a negative thought (which we all regularly have!), and worry or rumination. Just follow these 4 simple steps.

Step 1: Schedule your worry time

Start by choosing a particular time, place and time period for worrying (e.g. 5 pm, my office, 15 minutes). Put it in your calendar each day for a week to start with. Don't make it too close to your bedtime, for obvious reasons.

Step 2: Postpone your worry

As soon as you become aware of an old thought or worry, be quick to catch it and postpone it to the worry time. In a few words only, note the thought in your diary or a device. Remind yourself you'll have time to think about it later, so there's no need to worry about it now.

Step 3: Keep to your worry time

Review your thoughts or worries during your scheduled worry time. When your worry time arrives, sit down at the prearranged place and reflect on the things you wrote down during the day. Only worry about them if you feel you must. If some or all the worries you listed are no longer bothering you or no longer seem important, let them go and move on. Don't worry for the sake of it – we're trying to break the habit!

Step 4: Interrogate your worry

For each worry that's still bothering you, write in your notebook your answers to the following questions:

- What are you concerned about and why?

- Has event already past, can I do anything about it?
- If it's a future worry, how can this worry be solved?
- Can you ask someone to help you with this worry?

Remember that writing things down allows us to access the logical and rational parts of our brain, making it more likely we'll solve our worry. It also allows us to get the thoughts out of our head, relieving us of some of that heaviness and proving it won't last forever.

People are usually surprised to find that with practice they can postpone many of their worries and exercise greater control over their thoughts. This gives us a lot more freedom to do the things you enjoy in life – remember, no one gets any pleasure from worrying!