

# Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

# What Is Ruminating?



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## Description

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Recurrent negative thinking is a transdiagnostic process that is a common feature of many psychological disorders (Harvey, Watkins, Mansell & Shafran, 2004). Rumination is a form of recurrent negative thinking which repetitively focuses an individual's attention on his or her negative feelings, and the nature and implication of these feelings (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). It has been conceptualized as an ineffective attempt at problem solving.

This information handout follows Watkins' work classifying rumination as adaptive or maladaptive. Clients may find it helpful to understand their rumination in this context.

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## Instructions

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This is a Psychology Tools information handout.

Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – to provoke a discussion and explore your client's beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – to improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Supervision tool – to develop formulations and knowledge.
- Teaching resource – a learning tool during training.

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## References

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- Harvey, A. G. (2004). *Cognitive behavioural processes across psychological disorders: A transdiagnostic approach to research and treatment*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1991). Responses to depression and their effects on the duration of depressive episodes. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 100(4), 569.
- Watkins, E. R. (2008). Constructive and unconstructive repetitive thought. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(2), 163-206.
- Watkins, E. R. (2016). *Rumination-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy for depression*. Guilford Publications.

## What Is Rumination?

### Rumination is:

- dwelling on difficulties and things which distress us.
- repeatedly thinking about events from our past.
- becoming preoccupied with something and not being able to get it out of your mind.
- a learnt strategy for trying to deal with our problems.

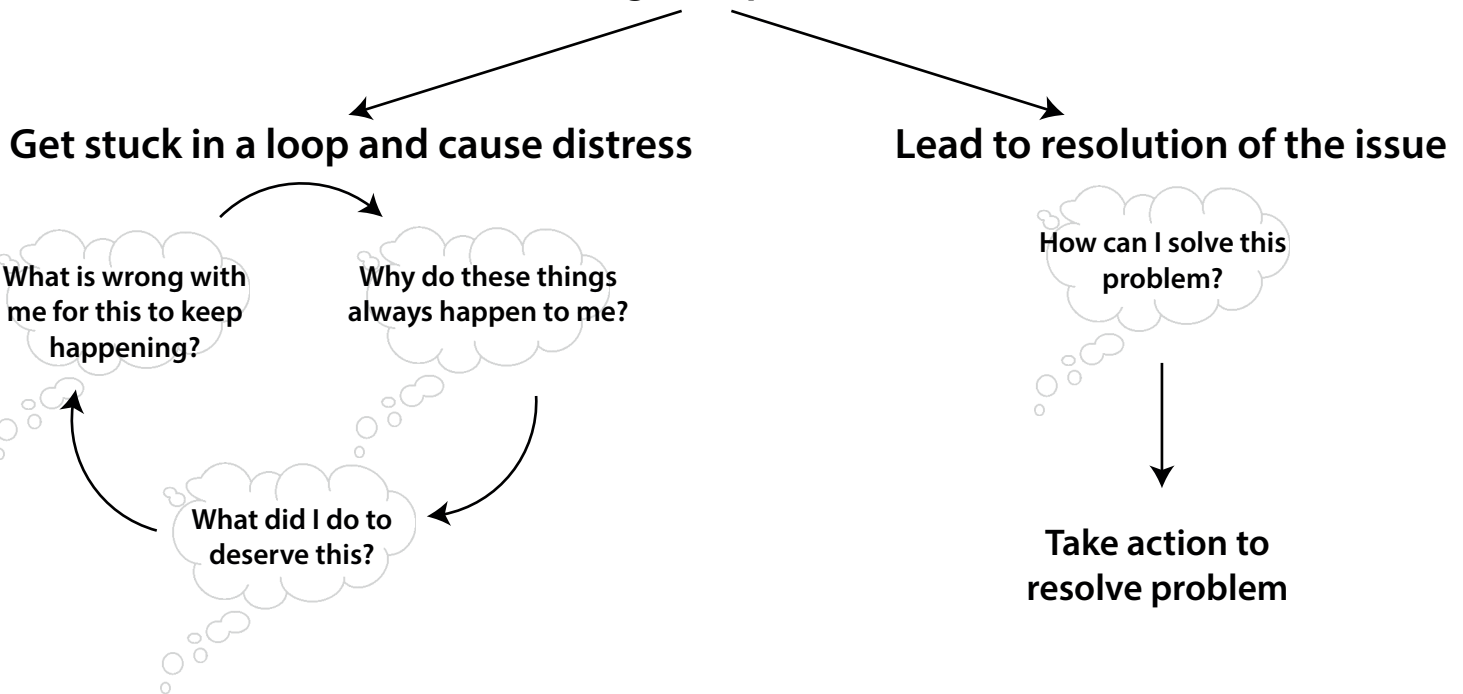
### Is rumination normal?

- Yes, to some extent everyone ruminates or dwells on their problems.
- Thinking about our problems can be helpful: especially if we reach a solution and put it into action.
- Most of the time, and for most people, rumination is time-limited: it stops when the problem is solved.
- Although rumination is normal, excessive rumination can become problematic.

### What are the problems with rumination?

- Unhelpful rumination tends to focus on causes and consequences instead of solutions: "What did I do to deserve this" and "Will my life ever get better?" instead of "How can I make my life better?".
- Rumination tends to focus on what has gone wrong and can lead to negative thinking.
- When used excessively, rumination can lead to depression.
- When used excessively, rumination can maintain an episode of depression.
- Unhelpful rumination can lead to inactivity and avoidance of problem-solving.

### Dwelling on a problem can



### Unhelpful rumination

Unhelpful rumination asks more "why ... ?" questions (this is sometimes called the 'evaluative mode' because these questions evaluate the meaning of events or situations).

"Why ... ?" questions tend to focus on the problem, its causes, and its consequences:

- "Why am I in this situation?"
- "What if it never gets better?"
- "What did I do to deserve this"

### Helpful rumination

Helpful rumination asks more "how ... ?" questions (this is sometimes called the 'process-focused' mode because these questions focus on the process of how events and situations happen).

"How ... ?" questions tend to focus on solving problems:

- "How can I get out of this situation?"
- "What can I do to make this better?"

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