

WHAT CAUSES OVERTHINKING & HOW TO OVERCOME IT

Have you ever thought, “I wish I could turn my brain off and just go to sleep”? When we overthink, what we’re often doing is trying to avoid making the wrong decision. We tend to exhaust ourselves analyzing, which can be more harmful than helpful. What we should focus our attention on is the decision we *want* to make.

If we fear making the wrong decision, we inadvertently may never get the outcome we’re hoping for—e.g., which house to buy, to accept the job offer or not, to relocate for a new opportunity. This indecisive immobility can impact more than just life-altering choices, it can even cause us to waste 30 minutes searching for a movie on Netflix simply because we have no focus on what we want to watch.

Chronic overthinking has the ability to create physical, mental, and emotional fatigue. This wasted energy often leads to frustration, anxiety, fear, depression, and can collectively take a significant toll on our daily lives. Agonizing on making a decision can cause us to doubt ourselves, looking for external validation vs. trusting our own instincts, which ultimately only inhibits our end goal—which is to *make a decision*.

Think about when you’ve lifted too many weights at the gym, or run a much farther distance than your body was trained to handle—overdoing it can unintentionally backfire by injuring yourself. The same is true for neurotically scrutinizing.

Here are some insights and practical tips to help combat the paralysis of overthinking.

1. CREATE AWARENESS

It will be difficult to work on overcoming exhausting thoughts if you don’t even recognize that your mind is in a war zone to begin with.

2. FOCUS YOUR INTENTIONS

Using the Netflix example—say you want to watch a movie—first decide which genre you’re in the mood for. Now your search has been narrowed down significantly; doing this will help you avoid going down the scroll hole.

3. WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS ON PAPER

Doing this step will help release lingering anxiety. Get to the source of where this doubt is coming from; overthinking is the symptom, so it’s important to get to the cause.

4. RECOGNIZE THAT YOU ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS

Just because you think it, doesn’t mean it’s true.

5. SHAKE IT UP

Give your brain a break by literally moving your body—jump, skip, dance—really anything that will help you shake off the sensation of feeling mentally stagnant. Another useful physical activity is practicing deep, methodical breathing to move your energy around.

If all of these steps are completed, and you still have some apprehension, ask yourself this validating question: In 10 days, 10 months, and 10 years from today, how will I feel about my decision? Answering this will help you put things into perspective, particularly if the decision is not a life-altering one.

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Once you’ve gotten a hold of your overthinking patterns, try practicing this simple decision-making process.

1. IDENTIFY A PROBLEM THAT NEEDS TO BE SOLVED

For example—you’re unemployed and fear you won’t find another opportunity to be hired. Once you’ve determined the problem, commit to making a decision.

2. SHIFT THE FOCUS TO AN OBJECTIVE BIRD’S-EYE POINT OF VIEW

Doing this will help you avoid getting caught up in your own biased, subjective perspective. If someone else had this exact same issue, what advice would you give them?

3. CREATE THREE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS / OUTCOMES TO YOUR PROBLEM

Let’s say one of the reasons you have a fear of not getting hired is because you lack confidence. Three possible solutions could be 1) leverage available resources (e.g., videos on YouTube, hire a business coach) to help update your resume and polish interviewing skills, 2) consider self-employment, 3) undergo training to enhance your professional portfolio.

4. EVALUATE THESE THREE ALTERNATIVE OUTCOMES

What are the pros of each solution and what are the cons of each solution?

5. WHICH OUTCOME APPEARS TO BE THE MOST ATTRACTIVE?

More than likely, finding the solution that has the most pros will help you make a decision.