

Think + Think + ... Think = Overthinking

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Introduction

Do you know how many hours per day do you think? Do you find your mind keeps coming up with a variety of options and analyzing that happening without reaching any solution? Do you aware that this is an overthinking mind where thought going round and round just like playing a movie show? Do you consider overthinking is good? In fact, we are thinking all the time, and yet, we never think about these before!

What's Overthinking?

The term "Overthink" is defined as the action of using one's mind to think too much about something; or putting too much time into thinking about or analyzing something (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, 2020).

Being an overthinker, a person is trying to control the future or constantly thinking about negative situations (Optimal Positivity, 2020). It is one of the most unhelpful mental habits. Overthinking is actually associated with uncertainty. A person probably feels that his future is being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally and he will try very hard to solve problems in the head; or he might be spending so much time ruminating or his mind is going over and over the same thing about something that has happened in the past.

In a study conducted by Arbor (2003), she found that 73% of adult in the age group between 25 and 35-year-olds are overthinkers, while 52% of adult in the age group of 45- to 55-year-olds are overthinkers. She also found that female tends to think too much as compared to male.

Is overthinking the same as worrying?

Although both overthinking and worrying involve too much thinking of negative thoughts, but there is a slightly different between them. Overthinking is thinking excessive about a past event. Whereas for worrying, one might think overly about a present or a future concern. Worry typically involves anxiety over future negative results. It is mostly related to asking the following two questions (Roy, n.d.):

1. What if the wrong thing happens?
2. What if the right thing doesn't happen?

What Causes Overthinking?

Why do people overthink? Research found that there are two general causes of overthinking (Roy, n.d.):

1. Passive behavior learned from over-controlling parents.
2. Stressful, traumatic, or negative incidents from the past experience.

How Overthinking Harms Human?

Overthinking is exhausting (Optimal Positivity, 2020). It can waste human's emotional energy and make people feel emotionally and physically drained. Overthinking can consume human's energy and reduce our ability to make decisions. It can also hold us back and increase our risk of anxiety. It can also cause us to wake up in the middle of the night or prevent us from falling asleep. It can make us more emotional, get angry more easily and have trouble concentrating and focusing. Overthinking can make us spend too much time in your head, so that we aren't emotionally present when we are around other people. As we are focused on our own thoughts instead of the person in front of us, it may make them feel that we aren't interested in the topic of discussion. And it may be detrimental to our relationships.

Roy (2020) has listed the following 10 effects of overthinking that might harm human:

1. Anxiety
2. Depression
3. Fear
4. Stress
5. Fatigue
6. Indecision
7. Substance abuse
8. Loneliness
9. Sleeplessness
10. Suicide risk

11 Mechanisms to Watch Out When Overthinking:

Since overthinking can harm us, there is a need for us to be aware if the moment we are overthinking. A list of eleven mechanisms for us to remember when overthinking is taking place in our mind (Optimal Positivity, 2020):

1. Overthinking is the voice of criticism, which attempts to destroy human being, because it doubts everybody and everything surrounding us. It can make us second guess everything and doubt ourselves. It can stop us from following our instinct.
2. It's the art of creating problems that is not real at all. Oftentimes, it includes thoughts about "What if?" and thoughts about all the things that could possibly not right.
3. It's the art of thinking so much about things that we ruin something before it even starts, and replay everything in our mind only.
4. If a person is an overthinker, he might get stuck in his life, since he is so curious, he wants to understand the why, and he will want to analyze and reflect. It may be his curse if he does not know how to be constructive with his voice.
5. Overthinking can be parasitic. Letting ourselves fall victim to overthinking can destroy our happiness and destroy who we are. The mind is a complex and beautiful thing, and the only person that can hurt it is ourselves.

6. We overthink things in order to control our future or change our past — both of which are futile. Rumination about our future and past can morph into feelings of distress, worry, guilt, shame, and regret. Overthinking is a bad habit that may steal our joy and cause us emotional suffering. It may not only steal our confidence, but also our ability to solve problems.
7. Our brain wants to work over-time, especially when we are trying not to think about something or trying to fall asleep.
8. Stop overthinking, as we cannot control everything. We cannot control everything, so do not even try to. We can only control what's going on in our mind. We can have influence over around the world around us, but we cannot truly control anything. It can be frustrating, particularly when we think our vision for our surroundings is superior to the natural expression.
9. Overthinking cannot empower us over things, which are beyond our control. That's why we should just let it be as well as cherish the moment.
10. Stop worrying about what happened in the past or what tomorrow may bring. Just focus on what we can control. Enjoy today, stay positive, and expect good things to come.
11. When we do not let ourselves fall victim to overthinking, we have more inner peace, we are more productive, and we are likely to be happier.

Overthinking Quiz

Table 1 is a simple quiz adapted from a website entitled “If You Overthink Too Much, This Quiz Will Tell You” (Rivas, 2018). You may take the quiz to do a self-check whether you have a sign of overthinking habit.

Table 1: If You Overthink Too Much, This Quiz Will Tell You (Rivas, 2018)

No	Item	Yes	No
1	Do you replay conversations in your head hours later because SURELY you came off the wrong way or you offended someone or it was awkward, and now you're worrying?		
2	Do you usually take longer than you should getting dressed because really, your outfit has to be JUST RIGHT?		
3	Are you indecisive about big decisions, because, what if it all goes wrong?		
4	Do you ruminate about what people really meant after saying ~that thing~ they said?		
5	Are you constantly wondering if you forgot to do something, like lock your door or turn off the stove?		
6	Do you rehearse what you're going to say just about a million times before an important conversation so that there's absolutely no way you'll stumble on your words?		
7	Do you even rehearse how you'll react to the other person's responses, then internally freak out when it doesn't play out like that?		
8	Do you stay awake at night thinking about your day, or about everything you have to do tomorrow?		
9	Are you constantly wondering why someone hasn't texted you back when they responded LITERALLY RIGHT AFTER THE TEXT YOU SENT BEFORE THIS ONE.		
10	Could you could write a whole book of irrational worst-case scenarios for different situations because, let's be honest, you can never be too prepared?		
11	Do you randomly get distracted thinking about something super embarrassing that happened years ago?		
12	Are you an expert at decoding and interpreting any and all social media statuses?		
13	Do you always end up deleting statuses or tweets because you're worried people will take them the wrong way?		
TOTAL number of tick for each column			

To get your score, count the total number of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ that you have ticked. If you answered ‘Yes’ more than ‘No’, it’s possible you have a tendency to overthink.

How to Stop Overthinking?

In our literature search, we found that there are hundreds over posts on how to stop overthinking. Foroux (2018) suggested that the only way to stop overthinking is to stop following through on all our thoughts and must learn to live in the present moment. The four steps are:

1. **Raise our awareness throughout the day.** We must always realize and remind that too much thinking defeats the purpose.
2. **When our awareness raises, immediately start observing our thoughts.** That is, every moment when we start thinking, don’t follow through, just observe how we start thinking. When we do that, we are able to stop it automatically.
3. **Only limit our thinking to specific moments that we need it.** For example, when we are thinking about setting our daily priorities, sit down and think. That might take 5 minutes. During that time, it’s perfectly fine to think and follow through on our thoughts. Or, when we’re journaling, we are also thinking during the process. That’s also fine. We’re trying to stop the constant thinking. We don’t want to become a monk.
4. **Enjoy our life!** We must let go of all our thoughts about yesterday and tomorrow. This is because tomorrow never come, and yesterday is already past! No matter how much we want to achieve in the future, and no matter how much we are suffered in the past — appreciate that we are still alive: NOW.

Final Words

Overthinking is one of the most vulnerable factors in our personality that puts us at a high risk of depression. It has also been linked to the anxiety spectrum of disease. Do remember that thinking is the biggest cause of our happiness. We should always keep ourselves occupied with joy and keep our mind off things that don't help us. We must aware that thinking is a tool only, and instead of using that tool during the 16 or 17 hours that we are awake, we should limited the use of it, and just use when we need it only. So, we should stay watchful and take early note if we are begun to overthink. We should try to use the four methods to stop overthinking habit before it lets in other disruptive mental disorders.

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