

Everybody worries from time to time – so when does worrying become overthinking?

Overthinking is simply what its name suggests – thinking too much. Overthinking is going over the same thought again and again, analysing the simplest of situations or events until all sense of proportion has gone. The overthinking brain cannot translate these thoughts into actions or positive outcomes, so therefore creates feelings of stress and anxiety.

Find out more about [Hypnotherapy for anxiety](#) here. I am also currently offering a free initial consultation you can [book here](#).

The phrase “overthinking” is often used quite flippantly these days. (You can picture the social media posts: “I’m overthinking my holiday packing. Lol.”) But for the genuine overthinker, there is nothing shallow or light-hearted about their thoughts. What distinguishes overthinking from merely thinking?

Am I over-thinking?

Surely we all overthink to some extent? As parents, sons or daughters, employees or business people, worrying about things is linked to caring about our loved ones, and about doing a good job.

However, people who really struggle with overthinking tend to be “ruminators”, going over events that have already happened. Plain old worrying tends to be about the future: can I meet this deadline? Can I find a nice residential flat for my mum? Often, our worries help us move forwards as we are working out how to mitigate them; however overthinking tends to be passive rather than active, dwelling on past events and building up disproportionately negative future results.

Take this scenario. You accidentally call your new boss by the wrong name. What do you think and feel when you realise this later?

The average worrier will feel mildly embarrassed, plan to apologise with some self-deprecating comment the next day, then forget about it and make dinner. The overthinker will replay this error over and over, while rewriting different outcomes. By four in the morning, he or she will be mentally creating scenarios of being passed over for future promotions, or even chosen for redundancy. The incident has triggered big questions in the overthinking mind, which blow the whole event way out of proportion.

This may seem like a trivial example; however it’s a good illustration of how over-thinking can take over many facets of your life. Dwelling on a past event and making catastrophic predictions from it are classic examples of what an overthinking mind can do.

Overthinking comes from your primitive emotional part of your brain

Like many traits of anxiety and depression, overthinking actually comes from one of our primitive preservation instincts.

The primitive mind will always see things from the worst possible perspective. This is because the brain is being hyper-vigilant, trying to keep us alive – there’s no sense in being optimistic about those sabre-toothed tigers I’ve mentioned before!

The intellectual brain will tell us that no way will we lose our job because we called our boss by the wrong name. However, people prone to rumination are responding in that primitive fight-or-flight mode, where focusing on worst-case scenarios is more likely to keep us alive. Overthinking and anxiety work together, exacerbating the feelings of stress and helplessness.

Overthinking fills the stress bucket

It's easy to create anxiety through negative future forecasting. However, dwelling on the past can also make us feel extremely anxious. Negative thoughts fill our "stress bucket" to the point where we feel that one more drip, one more thought, will make us overflow.

How can we empty our stress bucket? At night, we enter the amazing healing process of REM sleep, where our brains go over the day's events, moving them from the emotional, primitive brain to the intellectual side. The brain files events away, together with the emotion, and suppressed emotion, and turns them into memories and narratives for another day. The brain may also 'live out' unspent emotion via our dreams in order to use up unspent adrenalin as part of this process. The person who called their boss by the wrong name won't have forgotten the incident over night, but won't really be thinking about it by the morning.

The overthinking person will not be so fortunate. If he or she is not sleeping well, due to overthinking, tossing and turning whilst ruminating over the events, then they miss out on this vital REM sleep, perhaps waking up during the night, or not able to get to sleep until the early hours by which time it's time to get up and start the day with low energy and low mood.

How solution focused hypnotherapy can prevent overthinking

Everyone overthinks sometimes. The problems arise for people who find it very difficult to stop the thoughts. Whereas the occasional over-thinker can intellectualise the initial worry, the real ruminator is subject to a constant barrage of negative thoughts. Naturally, it's all too easy for a vicious circle to develop, as increased anxiety leads to further overthinking, and so on.

So what we need to do is break this cycle. Solution focused hypnotherapy, with its focus on the present and the future, is a logical way of tackling overthinking. By creating a contrived trance state, we achieve a state where both sides of the brain come together – and this is when we can start to replace all these negative thoughts with positive thoughts for the future.

We talk about solutions and ways forward, helping you to set achievable goals, and to recognise those times when you are coping well and to build upon those strengths and resources.

Hypnosis itself reduces anxiety through relaxation and visualisation, allowing people to focus on the positive aspects of their lives, resulting in shift towards an optimistic – and indeed, realistic – perspective.

That new boss you accidentally called by then wrong name? It's opened up a great chance for an informal chat, and that's always good, right?

Let's start thinking about overthinking – together

You're not alone. Overthinking is something many people experience, and I can work with you to overcome it.

The cycle of overthinking and anxiety can easily be broken using solution focused hypnotherapy. This is a natural, calming, and safe way to begin to manage your thoughts again.

I'm Debbie Daltrey, the founder of Great Minds Clinic and an Anxiety UK Approved Therapist. I am a solution focused hypnotherapist and a BACP Registered Counsellor. I'm a senior lecturer in hypnotherapy and I supervise other hypnotherapists. I run online hypnotherapy sessions for clients locally, UK, and across the World for English-speaking people. Why not book your free initial consultation