

6 STRATEGIES TO CONQUER OVERTHINKING

by Sharon Martin, LCSW

Many of my clients struggle with anxiety. They are smart and driven and can't "turn off" their brains. Overthinking, or ruminating, is a hallmark of anxiety. Many people find they get stuck in their worries and can't stop thinking about the same negative things over and over. Overthinking can negatively impact concentration, productivity, and sleep.

#1 My favorite technique is to write it down. I find this clears my mind and the process of writing helps clarify what's on my mind.

#2 Another strategy is to plan a time to worry. For example, you can schedule yourself worry time from 8:00 - 8:15. Whenever you notice you are worrying or overthinking, redirect and remind yourself that you can think about this topic at 8:00, but until then you are focusing on other things.

#3 Along with the previous strategy, I suggest limiting yourself to 15-30 minutes for worry or writing about your worries. This is sufficient time, but not so much that it takes over your day. It's important to set a firm time limit because it can easily go on indefinitely unless you put some boundaries around it.

#4 Distraction is a very practical strategy that we all use. Sometimes we need to find something else to do or think about to divert our attention. Sometimes work, talking to a friend, watching a funny video, reading, or music can do the trick.

#5 Occasionally you may need to firmly tell yourself to stop thinking about something. Snapping a rubber band against your wrist serves the same purpose. It's almost a wake-up call to startle you to think and act differently.

#6 Lastly, I find it useful to determine if there is something I can do about my worry. If there is, do it. If not, realize it's out of your control and all you can do is process and accept it - not change it.

- Write it down
- Plan a time to worry
- Set a time limit on worrying
- Distract Yourself
- Tell yourself firmly to stop
- Can you change it?