

OCD Rumination: How to Identify and Stop Ruminations

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is characterised by obsession and compulsion, and rumination falls under compulsion. But unlike physical compulsions, OCD rumination is mental, making it easy to dismiss. The sad truth, however, is that they are not insignificant. In fact, these compulsive thoughts are a core feature of OCD.

When obsessive thoughts appear, people with OCD don't dismiss them - they ruminate to solve the problem. However, this is a trap because instead of solving the problem, it worsens their OCD.

This article talks about OCD rumination and the negative role it plays in OCD. We will also delve into its symptoms and how to manage and stop those negative compulsions.

What is OCD rumination?

OCD rumination is a crucial aspect of OCD. It involves spending long periods thinking and worrying about specific obsessive thoughts or actions.

You are ruminating when you analyse, review, and turn over the same thoughts.

Rumination can be positive, but obsessive rumination is a negative thought pattern that is difficult to stop. In fact, some people who ruminate don't quickly realise that they are doing so.

Also, contrary to its name, obsessive rumination disorder is not an obsession but a compulsion. This is because people willingly contemplate these thoughts. In other words, they are the architect of your ruminations. Here's how it works;

When an intrusive thought pops up, the person dwells on it to find a solution to the problem. They could also ruminate to reassure themselves that intrusive thoughts do not exist. So while they think they are remedying the situation, these people get trapped in an intrusive thought.

However, it's crucial to note that this act is not limited to OCD. People with other mental conditions, like depression and anxiety disorders, show signs of rumination. Phobias and perfectionism can also lead to rumination.

To better understand the term, let's break things down a bit by talking about intrusive thoughts and compulsions and how they relate to rumination.

Intrusive thoughts vs. rumination vs. physical compulsion

Imagine that OCD is a person. Intrusive thoughts, rumination, and compulsion are different parts of the OCD body. If we are to label body parts, rumination will serve as the heart. Intrusive thoughts and physical compulsion are other vital parts.

With this illustration in mind, let's look at what each term means:

Intrusive thoughts

Intrusive thoughts are what they are called - intrusions. They are involuntary thoughts and fears that occupy your mind due to an obsession. These thoughts are usually disturbing, and the sufferer sees them as problems that need solving.

For instance, people with [harm OCD](#) have intrusive thoughts about hurting a loved one or even a stranger.

Rumination

In OCD, ruminations are repetitive thoughts born out of intrusive thoughts. It is a type of compulsion caused by an obsession. Compulsion, because though it compels you to ruminate (triggered by your intrusive thoughts), it's stoppable.

Since intrusions are distressing, people with OCD ruminate to find solutions to their intrusive thoughts. Sometimes, they also do this to seek reassurance that the problem is not factual.

People with harm OCD will ruminate on the intrusive thought of harming someone. Assuming it's a loved one, they would imagine scenarios where this could happen and actively think of ways to prevent these situations.

Physical compulsion

Then, the last link in this chain is physical compulsion. Unlike ruminating compulsions, thoughts that end in your head, other compulsions take a more physical approach.

For a person who constantly thinks about how germs are harmful (contamination OCD), their physical compulsion can involve refusing to shake or hug people or going about with sanitiser.

Going back to our earlier example, when a person with harm OCD is convinced they are a threat to a loved one, they will take physical measures to restrain themselves. For instance, they could completely cut off the person or avoid being alone with them.

Let's quickly run through other examples of intrusive thoughts and their corresponding ruminating thoughts.

Common examples of intrusive thoughts

- Fear of germs and contamination
- Existential preoccupations
- Disturbing thoughts of inappropriate sexual activities
- The fear of not being good enough for your spouse
- Severe thoughts about perfection
- Fear of harming oneself or others
- Worrying that you have sinned against God

Corresponding examples of ruminating compulsions

- Wondering for days if you are living out your purpose.
- Running through your childhood memories to determine if there are any signs of paedophilia you had missed.
- Make a mental assessment of your husband's female friends to see if any of them are more fitting than you.
- Worrying whether the market woman who coughed close to you has infected you with coronavirus
- Mentally re-assessing an already submitted assignment constantly to assure yourself that you did a perfect job.
- Being scared that your dislike for your boss will make you kill him.
- Running through your day's activity to make sure you didn't do anything that could make God angry at you.

Disclaimer: Ticking a box or two doesn't mean you have rumination OCD. People ruminate from time to time, so it's not always out of place. Check the DSM-5 [\(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual](#)

[of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition](#)) to see if you meet the criteria for OCD, and also get in touch with an expert.

Symptoms of rumination

Unlike other features of obsessive-compulsive disorder, rumination can easily go unnoticed because it is a mental process. If ruminating thoughts don't manifest physically as compulsions, you will likely pay less attention to them.

People don't consider rumination a significant problem, but this is a misconception. Remember, we said ruminating thoughts are the heart of OCD? So, identifying these thoughts is crucial to managing OCD.

Sufferers may be unable to identify these negative repetitive thoughts, so how do you differentiate them from normal ruminations?

Here are some key rumination OCD symptoms to watch for:

1. Thoughts centred around a specific fear or OCD.
2. Thoughts targeted toward solving a problem directly related to your obsession.
3. Reflections aimed at gaining insight or reassuring yourself within the context of your obsession.
4. Ruminations that don't proffer any solution.
5. Exaggerated thoughts and imaginations.
6. Thinking in unending circles.
7. Thoughts that appear so crucial that you cannot move on to others until you find an answer.

How to stop ruminating

It would be nice to say, "Just stop!" but, like other health issues, change or treatment doesn't happen overnight. Nonetheless, the good news is that you can stop ruminating because it is within your control. So, here are some ways to do so:

1. Therapy

The best way to treat OCD rumination is through therapy. A few therapy treatments are used, but only a therapist can decide which is best for you. If you have yet to be diagnosed with OCD but suspect you are suffering from it, go for a medical examination.

The most common treatments for **OCD rumination** are Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

- ERP Therapy involves exposing patients to situations that provoke their obsessions. This therapy, however, is done in a controlled environment. It teaches patients coping skills to help control their obsessive thoughts and actions. ERP has so far [proven quite successful](#) in managing and stopping rumination OCD.
- Conversely, [Rumination-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#) (RFCBT) helps patients change their negative thoughts. This approach primarily targets ruminating thoughts, making it more effective. When negative thoughts are converted to positive ones, rumination stops.

2. Confront your thoughts

While therapy involves confronting your thoughts, you don't have to be in a session to do so. Whenever a ruminating thought comes up, confront it. Question your thoughts and analyse whether they are rational.

Questioning your thoughts helps you realise that dwelling on them wastes time. When you know it's aimless, it will be easier not to fall into the trap.

3. Talk to a family member or a friend

Confronting your thoughts is just a step toward stopping ruminating OCD. Talking to a friend or family member also helps you solidify the idea that these thoughts are pointless.

Discuss your thoughts with a friend or family member and ask for their opinion. They will help you see that you're on a wild goose chase.

4. Identify your triggers

For most people, these thoughts are triggered. To reduce the risk of ruminating thoughts, identify your triggers. Keep a notepad close to you to jot down the triggering factor when your next obsessive thought pops up.

Once you have identified several triggers, think of a reasonable way to prevent them from arousing your obsessions.

For example, if you have checking [OCD](#), and your trigger is being unsure of having put things together before leaving for work. You need to find ways to complete your chores on time or, better still, keep a checklist.

5. Meditation

Meditation clears your mind and helps ward off obsessive thoughts. So, spend some time meditating to take control of your thoughts.

There are many types of meditation; if you don't know how they work, try [meditation apps](#) or watch YouTube videos. If you can't get them right alone, consider guided meditations.

6. Distract yourself

Do something you love that is an active distraction. See a movie, play video games, read a book, or hang out with friends.

However, you can't easily fan away all obsessive ruminations. They might find their way back to you. Thus, distraction is mostly a temporary solution. When you are ready to face your fears, confront your thoughts.

The Gist

Like intrusive thoughts and compulsion, rumination lies at the core of OCD. OCD ruminations are repetitive negative thoughts disguised as solutions, whereas they only serve to worsen the disorder.

They trap a person into spending all of their time worrying and examining a perceived problem. People suffering from severe OCD ruminations lose their productivity in the long run, as they can't get the thoughts out of their minds.