

COMBAT RACING THOUGHTS

The difficult part is that the more you experience racing thoughts, the stronger they become and that can definitely make you feel out of control. So, it's important to find ways to calm your mind or clear out the thoughts. Here are some ways you can work to stop racing thoughts.

Use cognitive distancing: Usually our mind worries about things that it is convinced are true. But most of the time, these things are actually not true. You can balance your mind's tendency to predict that something bad will happen by coming up with positive alternative scenarios. For instance, your spouse seems distant and is sending a lot of emails. You decide he must be having an affair. An alternative scenario is that he is working extra hard on a project. Analyse what's most likely to happen. Most of the time, the worst-case scenario your brain came up with is not the one that's most likely to happen.

Use a mantra: A mantra is just a simple phrase or word that you repeat to calm your mind. Research has shown that repeating a mantra reduces activity in the part of your brain that is responsible for self-judgment and reflection. This is the part of the brain that spends so much time rehashing the past and worrying about the future.

You can use any word, sound, or saying you want. You could try something like, "om," "Life is good," or "Everything is ok." Repeat your phrase over and over, focusing your thoughts only on your mantra. If your mind wanders, return to your mantra. You can practice this almost anytime, even going around the supermarket or on your commute home from work.

Focus on the present: An overactive mind is constantly thinking about the past or the future. Returning your focus to the present will help you accept and let go of what you cannot control. It will also help you realize that you can't change the past, and the future hasn't happened yet, so it's a waste of time to keep thinking about them. (This doesn't mean that you are unaware of what happened in the past or what is about to happen in the future.) Try taking a deep breath and asking yourself how you are feeling right now.

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Write things down: Putting your concerns on paper can be very helpful because it allows you to return to them later. You don't have to dismiss them entirely, and you can feel comfortable knowing you will revisit the concern. Also, the act of writing engages your mind and reduces the power of racing thoughts. When thoughts are in your mind, they feel chaotic. Putting them on paper organizes them. Use a notebook or a designated computer document. Once you've taken a few minutes to organize your thoughts on paper or a screen, your mind will be calmer. If you want, set aside a time limit to think about them before taking a break and coming back to them later.

Breathe: This shifts the fight-or-flight response of the sympathetic nervous system to the relaxed response of the parasympathetic nervous system. Try counting to three as you breathe in and to five as you breathe out. Pay attention only to your breathing as you try to slow it down. Your mind will wander, but just bring it back to your breathing.

Whichever of these tools you are using, it will take regular practice over a long period of time to see results. Unfortunately, many people expect the effects to be immediate and abandon the practice too soon. Instead, be consistent and patient. It takes time to develop new habits.

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