



## Break Free From the Rumination Cycle: Tune In or Tune Out

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Have you ever replayed past events or upcoming worries in your mind on repeat? This is called rumination, a cycle of [counterproductive thinking](#) that fuels anxiety and hinders the ability to take purposeful action to move forward. Using mindful thinking and mental games, you can learn to break free from this cycle and embrace a more present and peaceful state of mind.

### What Is Rumination?

Rumination often stems from [unresolved issues](#) or a perceived lack of control. It manifests as a repetitive loop of thoughts, often centered around “what ifs” and “should haves.” This thinking can lead to:

- **Increased anxiety and stress:** The constant focus on negativity worsens feelings of worry and apprehension.
- **Depressive symptoms:** Dwelling on past failures or regrets can contribute to the feeling of hopelessness.
- **Impaired problem-solving:** Rumination consumes mental energy, making it hard to focus on finding solutions.
- **Sleep disturbances:** The overactive mind struggles to quiet down, leading to difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep.

### Tune In With Mindfulness

[Mindfulness](#) is the practice of paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It involves observing thoughts, feelings and sensations as they arise, without getting carried away by them. This awareness allows distance between you and your thoughts, disrupting the rumination cycle.

- **Mindful breathing:** Focus on the sensation of each breath entering and leaving the body.
- **Body scan meditation:** Bring awareness to different parts of the body, noticing sensations without judgment.
- **Mindful walking:** Pay attention to the physical sensations of walking, like the movement of your feet and the environment around you.
- **Observe your thoughts:** When you notice yourself ruminating, acknowledge the thoughts without judgment and gently redirect your attention to the present moment.
- **Challenge negative thoughts:** Ask yourself if your thoughts are based on facts or assumptions.

### Tune Out With Mental Games

[Reset your focus](#) by playing a mental game. Briefly distract yourself from the counterproductive thoughts by focusing on a fun and challenging mental task. The most effective mental game is



whatever is amusing or interesting enough to play, and difficult enough to hold your attention for a few minutes. Mental games allow you to “change the channel” from ruminative thoughts and induce a little positive emotion as you complete the game. Some examples:

Pick a category, such as childhood cartoons, and list as many items in the category as you can in one minute; for example: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, ThunderCats, and so forth.

Go through the alphabet in letter pairs and name a person with those initials, such as AB: Antonio Banderas, BC: Bryan Cranston, and so forth.

Recite the Army alphabet backward: Zulu, Yankee, X-ray, and so forth.

By tuning in to yourself and your thoughts with mindfulness, or tuning out with a mental game, you can disrupt the [cycle of rumination](#). This shift in perspective allows you to refresh your focus, take action and move forward.

## References and Resources

A mindfulness meditation primer

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/performance-psychology/mindfulness-meditation-primer>

Cope With Emotions Through Mindfulness

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/performance-psychology/cope-emotions-through-mindfulness>

Improve Your Wellbeing by Changing Counterproductive Thinking

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Counterproductive-Thinking.html>

Leading With Attention: Mindfulness Takes Hold as Army Embraces the Now

<https://www.ausa.org/articles/leading-attention-mindfulness-takes-hold-army-embraces-now>

Mindfulness: Boosting Your Capacity Under Stress

<https://wrair.health.mil/News-Media/Investigators-Dispatch-Fact-Sheets/Display-Factsheet/Article/3277104/mindfulness-boosting-your-capacity-under-stress/>

Mindfulness for the Military

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/stress/mindfulness-military>

Mindfulness to Improve Your Family Relationships

<https://www.hprc-online.org/social-fitness/family-optimization/mindfulness-improve-your-family-relationships>

Mindfulness Meditation Can Change Your Brain and Optimize Performance

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/sleep-stress/mindfulness-meditation-can-change-your-brain-and-optimize-performance>

Practice Mental Agility to Cope with Adversity and Thrive

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Practice-Mental-Agility.html>



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Practice Mindfulness Through Everyday Activities

<https://www.hprc-online.org/mental-fitness/stress/practice-mindfulness-through-everyday-activities>

Practice Mindfulness for Better Quality of Life

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Mindfulness.html>

Stress Mindset Self-Check

[https://www.hprc-online.org/sites/default/files/document/HPRC%20Stress%20Mindset%20Self-Check\\_072722\\_508.pdf](https://www.hprc-online.org/sites/default/files/document/HPRC%20Stress%20Mindset%20Self-Check_072722_508.pdf)

