Rumination diary

Make one brief entry after an episode. You do not need to track every thought.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

What set the thinking off?

e.g. I remembered an awkward conversation on the bus home.

What question or thought kept repeating?

e.g. Why do I always get things wrong?

What was I hoping the thinking would do?

e.g. Explain the conversation so I would not repeat the mistake.

What actually happened to my mood and actions?

e.g. I became more withdrawn and put off making dinner.

Is there a specific problem or one useful next step?

e.g. No new problem to solve; make a simple dinner and eat.

What did I try, and what did I learn?

e.g. Cooking helped me re-engage even though the memory returned.

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Rumination diary - guide

Use alongside the worksheet on page 1. Adapt it to your needs and any therapy plan.

What this helps with

Rumination means repeatedly going over a difficulty, often with broad questions such as 'Why am I like this?' Reflection can be useful when it brings new understanding or a next step. This diary helps you notice when thinking has become stuck and try a more concrete response.

How to use it

1. Notice the episode and make a short note afterwards, rather than monitor your mind continuously.
2. Ask whether the thinking is producing new information, a decision or a specific action.
3. If there is a practical problem, describe it in concrete terms and plan one step. If you are circling the same question, gently return to a chosen activity.
4. Review whether the response helped you take part in life. Success does not require the thought to disappear.

A fictional example

Omar spends the evening asking why he is falling behind. Each answer leads to another judgement. He changes the question to, 'What is one thing I need to do this evening?' He prepares tomorrow's lunch. The worry about falling behind returns, but he can notice it and continue. In therapy he later considers whether there is a practical workload issue to address.

Keep in mind

This is not an instruction to suppress thoughts, ignore grief or avoid a real problem. It is also not a substitute for trauma-focused work. If persistent low mood, intrusive memories or repetitive thinking seriously affects daily life, seek individual assessment and support.

Review your learning

Did I move towards a useful action, new understanding or something I value?

Sources informing the approach

Watkins, E. R. (2008). Constructive and unconstructive repetitive thought. Psychological Bulletin, 134(2), 163-206. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.134.2.163.

NICE (2022). Depression in adults: treatment and management. NG222.

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