

EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



WHAT'S INSIDE:

Page 2: *Break the Rumination Cycle*

Page 4: *Healthy Body, Happy Heart*

Page 5: *Be Prepared to Stay Safe and Healthy in Winter*

DEER OAKS EAP PRESENTS:
February OnDemand Seminar
Navigating Through Grief and Loss

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Break the Rumination Cycle

Do you ever find yourself stewing over work, past events, or worries when you'd like to be relaxing, paying attention to your partner or child, or sleeping? This repetitive return to unhappy or disturbing thoughts without productive resolution is called rumination, and it can be damaging to your health, your relationships, and your ability to move forward in life.

You might ruminate over:

- A frustrating or worrisome situation at work
- A conflict with your partner, a friend, your boss, or a coworker
- Criticism you've received
- Financial pressure

Why Rumination Is a Problem

If rumination led to solutions and improvements in your life, it might be a good thing. Too often, however, rumination simply adds to your stress and undermines your wellbeing:

- Rumination revives the negative emotions that are associated with an unhappy or disturbing event. Instead of processing those emotions and moving on, rumination causes your brain to stir them up over and over again.
- A habit of rumination prevents you from relaxing, restoring your mental energy, and enjoying the moment you are in. It can muddle your thinking and damage relationships, fueling a destructive cycle that can intensify self-critical thoughts and feelings of isolation.
- Rumination can interfere with your sleep, and poor sleep quality can negatively affect your thinking, your ability to manage your moods, and your health.
- Rumination is associated with depression. A habit of rumination can prolong an episode of depression, while interfering with efforts to get needed social support.

How to Break the Rumination Cycle

When you get stuck in a cycle of rumination, it can be hard to get out of it. The recurring thoughts can harden into a habit with similarities to unhealthy lifestyle habits like smoking or drinking (but fortunately without the addictive biochemistry). To avoid this, it's best to address rumination quickly, before it becomes an established thought pattern.

Here are some tips for when you find yourself ruminating:

- **Make productive efforts to find a solution.** Instead of simply reliving your unhappy experience, look for

a solution. Think about what you can do to improve the situation, keep it from happening again, or move on from it on a positive forward path. Break down the steps you need to take to move forward, and plan in your mind how you'll take them. Become a problem solver.

- **If you are ruminating about work when you are home,** build a real or symbolic transition into the shift from work to home life. A commute can do this. So can a walk around the block, a change of clothes, turning on some relaxing music, or anticipating a happy conversation unrelated to work.
- **Distract yourself from the ruminating thoughts.** Do something that makes it difficult or impossible to think your repetitive thoughts:
 - Call a friend or family member (and don't even think about mentioning your ruminating worry).
 - Read a book or listen to an audiobook.
 - Play a game or do a challenging puzzle.
 - Watch a movie.
 - Listen to music that absorbs your attention.
 - Exercise.
 - Go for a walk around your neighborhood or in nature.
 - Engage in a hobby or passion (drawing, woodworking, music, knitting, etc.).
- **Challenge your thinking.** Is this a real problem, or could you be blowing it out of proportion? Might there be another explanation for what you think happened? Might someone else see the situation differently? If you're imagining worst-case outcomes, ask yourself how realistic those are? What's a more likely outcome? Talking to a friend might help you put things in perspective and get a more realistic assessment. (Beware of using a friend to help fan the flames of your rumination.)
- **Avoid overthinking mistakes.** Everyone makes mistakes. It's how people learn and grow. Making a mistake does not make you a less worthy person. If you've made a mistake, think about what you can learn from it and do differently next time. Forgive and be kind to yourself.
- **Try mindfulness and meditation.** In the practice of mindfulness, you focus on the present moment, your experience right now. What happened yesterday or earlier today is not relevant. When engaging in mindfulness you also accept and embrace your current

experience, including its joy and pain. You let go of judgment. Clearing your mind in meditation can have a similar effect in breaking the cycle of ruminating thoughts. Both practices shift your attention, make you aware of your thoughts and feelings, and help you move toward acceptance—all while helping you calm your body and your mind.

When You're Stuck in Rumination

When you're stuck in an enduring cycle of rumination and one-time measures aren't enough, it can help to deal with the problem as an unhealthy habit. Habits are triggered by cues in your environment, emotions, or thinking. When you experience a trigger, your habitual behavior or thinking follows a set pattern.

Here are some tips to break a rumination habit:

- **Identify the cues that trigger your ruminating thoughts.** When do you tend to ruminate? In the evening? At night when you're trying to sleep? After a particular type of event? When you're alone? When you're sad? In certain places? You might keep a log for a week or so to note the patterns of your ruminating thoughts. Recognizing the situations in which you have ruminating thoughts can help you identify the cues that trigger them.
- **Where you can, avoid or change the cues that trigger your rumination.** You might do this by changing your routine. If you tend to ruminate when you first get home from work and try to relax, do something else when you first get home. Call someone. Go for a walk. Read a chapter of a book. If watching or listening to the news lowers your mood and invites rumination, watch or listen to something else. Shaking up your routine can help you disrupt your ruminating habit.
- **Find alternative responses to your rumination cues, and practice them.** Once you've identified the cues that trigger your rumination, come up with alternative responses to them. Take a different action when you experience those cues. If feeling sad is your trigger, pay attention to your emotions, and immediately do something different when you start to feel sad. Find a distracting activity that keeps your mind off your rumination. Over time, and with lots of practice, this new response will start to override your old ruminating habit.

How Therapy Can Help

Rumination habits can become so deeply ingrained that you may have trouble breaking the cycle by yourself:

- The practice of mindfulness can be helpful for many people and can be more helpful under the guidance of an expert.
- Working with a professional therapist, especially one with expertise in cognitive-behavioral therapy, can help you change unproductive thought patterns, including persistent rumination. There's even a specialty for helping people with rumination habits: rumination-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy.
- Because rumination can be associated with depression and other mental health problems, if your rumination problem is persistent and keeping you from living to your full potential, and especially if you have symptoms of another mental health problem, you should make an appointment with a mental health therapist.

For More Information

"Four Tips from Habit Research to Reduce Worry and Rumination," *Psychology Today* (By E.R. Watkins, July 28, 2013). <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mood-thought/201307/four-tips-habit-research-reduce-worry-and-rumination>

"How to stop ruminating thoughts," *Medical News Today* (Last medically reviewed November 8, 2019). <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/326944>

"How to turn off work thoughts during your free time," *Ted Talks* (By G. Winch, November 2019). https://www.ted.com/talks/guy_winch_how_to_turn_off_work_thoughts_during_your_free_time. (A transcript is available in 25 languages)

"The Seven Hidden Dangers of Brooding and Ruminating," *Psychology Today* (By G. Winch, June 13, 2013). <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201306/the-seven-hidden-dangers-brooding-and-ruminating>

Source: Morgan, H. (2021, October). Break the rumination cycle (C. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

American Heart Month

February 2022

Healthy Body, Happy Heart

Improve your heart health.

Every moment of the day, your heart is pumping blood throughout your body. In silent moments, you can hear the thump-thump-thump of its demanding work. Do you take your heart for granted? Most people will have heart trouble at some point in their lives. Heart disease is the number one killer of women and men in the United States—but you can take steps now to lower your risk.

“About 1 out of 3 people in America will die of heart disease,” says U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) heart disease expert Dr. David C. Goff Jr. “And about 6 out of every 10 of us will have a major heart disease event before we die.”

Heart disease develops when the blood vessels supplying the heart become clogged with fatty deposits, or plaque. After the blood vessels narrow, blood flow to the heart is reduced. That means oxygen and nutrients can’t get to the heart as easily.

Eventually, an area of plaque can break open. This may cause a blood clot to form on the plaque’s surface. A blood clot can block blood flowing to the heart. That can cause a heart attack. A heart attack happens when a vessel supplying the heart is blocked and the heart can’t get enough oxygen, which leads to death of heart muscle.

The three major risk factors for heart disease have been known since the 1960s: smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels. These were identified in NIH’s Framingham Heart Study, a long-term study of people in Framingham, Massachusetts.¹ “If we could eliminate cigarette smoking, elevated blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol levels, we could eradicate about 9 out of 10 heart attacks in our country,” says Dr. Daniel Levy, a heart specialist at NIH who oversees the Framingham Heart Study currently.

The study has also uncovered other risk factors, including diabetes, obesity, and physical inactivity. Levy’s research team is now hunting for genes that may be risk factors for heart disease. By understanding the factors that play a role in heart disease, scientists hope to find new ways to prevent and treat it.

Make healthy choices.

Talk with your doctor about your risk of heart disease and what you can do to keep your heart healthy. “The most

important things for everyone to do to keep their heart healthy—to keep their entire body healthy—is to eat a healthy diet, get plenty of physical activity, maintain a lean body weight, and avoid smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke,” Goff says.

Following a heart-healthy eating plan is important for everyone. “When someone puts food on their plate, about half the plate should be fruits and vegetables. About a quarter of the plate should be whole grain. About a quarter should be lean protein, like lean meat or seafood,” says Goff.

If you have high blood pressure, you may want to follow the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet. This diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole-grain foods, and low-fat dairy products. To learn more about the diet, see <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan>.

Goff also advises, “Avoid foods that have a lot of salt in them. Salt is a major contributor to high blood pressure and risk of heart disease.”

Prevent diabetes.

Diabetes increases your chances of high blood pressure and high cholesterol. You’re also more likely to develop heart disease and have a heart attack.

“Having diabetes is almost like already having heart disease,” says Dr. Larissa Avilés-Santa, a diabetes and heart health expert at NIH. She oversees a large NIH study of heart disease risk factors among more than 16,000 Hispanic/Latino adults.^{2,3}

Avilés-Santa says that sometimes people think that they will develop diabetes and heart disease no matter what they do, but that’s not true. Even if you have a family history of these diseases, you can be the messenger of good health for your family, she says. You can help your family by inspiring healthy habits.

The best way to prevent diabetes is through diet and physical activity. “The evidence is outstanding that very modest changes in lifestyle could reduce the risk of developing diabetes much greater than medication,” Avilés-Santa says.

Get help.

For some people, having a heart attack is the first sign of heart disease. Pain or discomfort in your chest or upper body, a cold sweat, or shortness of breath are all signs of a heart attack. If you feel any of these signs, get medical help right away. Acting fast can save your life and prevent permanent damage.

Heart disease and heart attacks are major risk factors for cardiac arrest, which is when the heart suddenly stops beating. Blood stops flowing to the brain and other parts of the body. If not treated within minutes, cardiac arrest can lead to death.

Heart disease and heart attacks can also make it harder for your heart's electrical system to work. As a result, an irregular heartbeat, or arrhythmia, can occur. Your heart may beat too fast, too slow, or with an uneven rhythm. A dangerous arrhythmia can lead to cardiac arrest.

Regular checkups help ensure that a doctor will check your heart for problems. Heart disease and arrhythmias can be treated to lower the risk of cardiac arrest.

Be good to your heart. Don't take it for granted. Get tested for heart disease, and follow your doctor's suggestions. See below for questions you may want to ask your doctor.

Ask your doctor:

Am I at risk for heart disease?

What tests do I need?

Is my blood pressure okay? If not, what should I do?

Is my cholesterol level okay? If not, what should I do?

Is my weight okay?

How much exercise do I need?

Am I at risk for diabetes?

How can you help me quit smoking?

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2. Daviglus, M.L., Pirzada, A., Durazo-Arvizu, R., Chen, J., Allison, M., Avilés-Santa, L., et al. (2016, August 20). *Prevalence of low cardiovascular risk profile among diverse Hispanic/Latino adults in the United States by age, sex, and level of acculturation: The Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos*. *Journal of the American Heart Association*, 5(8), pii: e003929. doi: 10.1161/JAHA.116.003929
3. Rodriguez, C.J., Cai, J., Swett, K., González, H.M., Talavera, G.A., Wruck, L.M., et al. (2015, June 24). *High cholesterol awareness, treatment, and control among Hispanic/Latinos: Results from the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos*. *Journal of the American Heart Association*, 4(7), pii: e001867. doi: 10.1161/JAHA.115.001867

Source: Wein, H., & Hicklin, T. (Eds.). (2017, November). *Healthy body, happy heart: Improve your heart health*. NIH News in Health. Bethesda, MD: U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). Retrieved September 4, 2019, from <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov>

Be Prepared to Stay Safe and Healthy in Winter

Winter storms and cold temperatures can be hazardous. Stay safe and healthy by planning ahead. Prepare your home and cars. Prepare for power outages and outdoor activity. Check on older adults.

Although winter comes as no surprise, many people are not ready for its arrival. If you are prepared for the hazards of winter, you will be more likely to stay safe and healthy when temperatures start to fall.

Take these steps for your home.

Many people prefer to remain indoors in the winter, but staying inside is no guarantee of safety. Take these steps to keep your home safe and warm during the winter months:

Winterize your home:

- Install weather stripping, insulation, and storm windows.
- Insulate water lines that run along exterior walls.
- Clean out gutters, and repair roof leaks.

Check your heating sources:

- Have your heating system serviced professionally to make sure that it is clean, working properly, and ventilated to the outside.
- Inspect and clean fireplaces and chimneys.
- Install a smoke detector. Test batteries monthly.
- Have a safe alternate heating source and alternate fuels available.

Prevent carbon monoxide (CO) emergencies:

- Install a CO detector to alert you of the presence of the deadly, odorless, colorless gas. Check batteries when you change your clocks in the fall and spring.
- Learn symptoms of CO poisoning: headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.

Don't forget to prepare your car.

Get your car ready for cold weather use before winter arrives:

- Service the radiator and maintain the antifreeze level; check tire treads, or if necessary, replace tires with all-weather or snow tires.
- Keep gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Use a wintertime formula in your windshield washer.
- Prepare a winter emergency kit to keep in your car in case you become stranded. The kit should include:
 - Mobile phone, portable charger, and extra batteries
 - Blankets
 - Food and water
 - Booster cables, flares, tire pump, and a bag of sand or cat litter (for traction)
 - Compass and maps
 - Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries
 - First-aid kit
 - Plastic bags (for sanitation)
- Learn safety precautions to follow when outdoors:
 - Be aware of the wind chill factor.
 - Work slowly when doing outside chores.
 - Take a buddy and an emergency kit when you are participating in outdoor recreation.
 - Carry a mobile phone.

Do this when you plan to travel.

When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions:

Equip in advance for emergencies.

Be prepared for weather-related emergencies, including power outages:

- Stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration, and store water in clean containers.
- Ensure that your mobile phone is fully charged.
- Keep an up-to-date emergency kit, including:
 - Battery-operated devices, such as a flashlight, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio, and lamps
 - Extra batteries
 - First-aid kit and extra medicine
 - Baby items
 - Cat litter or sand for icy walkways
- Protect your family from carbon monoxide:
 - Keep grills, camp stoves, and generators out of the house, basement, and garage.
 - Locate generators at least 20 feet from the house.
 - Leave your home immediately if the CO detector sounds, and call 911.

Take these precautions outdoors.

Many people spend time outdoors in the winter working, traveling, or enjoying winter sports. Outdoor activities can expose you to several safety hazards, but you can take these steps to prepare for them:

- Wear appropriate outdoor clothing: a tightly woven, preferably wind-resistant coat or jacket; inner layers of light, warm clothing; mittens; hats; scarves; and waterproof boots.
- Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches.

- Avoid traveling when the weather service has issued advisories.
- If you must travel, inform a friend or relative of your proposed route and expected time of arrival.
- Follow these safety rules if you become stranded in your car:
 - Make your car visible to rescuers. Tie a brightly colored cloth on the antenna, raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing), and turn on the inside overhead lights (when your engine is running).
 - Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area. Stay with your car unless safety is no more than 100 yards away.
 - Keep your body warm. Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers. Huddle with other people if you can.
 - Stay awake and stay moving. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems. As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve circulation and stay warmer.
 - Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let air in. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe—this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Check on family and neighbors who are especially at risk from cold weather hazards: young children, older adults, and the chronically ill. If you have pets, bring them inside. If you cannot bring them inside, provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink.

No one can stop the onset of winter. However, if you follow these suggestions, you will be ready for it when it comes.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Environmental Health. (Updated 2019, February 4). Be prepared to stay safe and healthy in winter. Retrieved November 13, 2019, from <https://www.cdc.gov>