

Write it Down

how to reduce the stress from over-thinking

There's so much to think about: routines to follow and hundreds of separate or related factors baying for attention; all of them at the same time. Trying to concentrate on a single concept exclusively is almost impossible. Our minds have a tendency to skip from one item under consideration to another, simply by association of ideas, a disruption that plagues most of us and we can well do without. A problem at work relates directly to commuting because we have to get there to tackle it. Straight away, here's a reminder that the car needs fixing, another chore consigned to the back-burner because the credit-card is maxed out. This, in turn, sends the mind off at a tangent into the realms of finance, and so on. Is it any wonder that the overload causes stress? Perhaps we ought to be thankful that the brain is working as it should: storing and collating information ready for instant use; but when we need it to slow down and not give us so much at once, it doesn't seem to take any notice. Even at night when we are supposed to be sleeping, the wheels in our heads continue to grind, on and on. If they don't stop sometime soon, we will end up a mental mess!

It's all well and good believing that you have the capacity to sort everything out in your head; but when this is clearly not working, an alternative has to be found. The solution, however, is at hand and is relatively simple – get the clutter out! Transfer it by writing it down. Pooh-pooh the idea if you like, but do consider this: your mind knows the importance of what concerns you, and it will keep presenting each and every problem as a constant reminder; if, however, you write down whatever is buzzing around in your head, there is no way you will forget any of it.

Listing down the priority issues on a sheet of paper is a start. Initially, there's no need to go into detail – this is just about the key-points that are foremost in your current situation. It's a good idea to leave some space after each listing because, as the list grows longer, those associations will undoubtedly spring to mind. The petty asides can go under the main topic they are related to; major issues that obviously need handling separately should have their own spot. Once they are there in hard-copy, there's no likelihood of forgetting them. Your mind knows this and, as a consequence, won't keep pestering you about them. That should free off some of the confusion.

Not everything in your head that you are concerned about is truly pertinent. Matters that cause frustration, even anger, may be totally unrelated to everyday life. These are often stimulated by reminders of situations which are way beyond your ability to resolve them. Politicians who continually go back on their promises; a growing crime rate; environmental issues; these are the kind of irritations that cloud judgement and create attitudes which further hamper rationality and logical thinking. You have opinions, maybe ideas that could solve some of society's problems; but you aren't the type of person who protests in public, or phones a radio chat-line to air your views. My suggestion is the same as for the important personal issues – write them down. Treat them the same as a letter of complaint. Write about your pet hates, your annoyances, your exasperation over the lack of commonsense. State what could be done, or what you would do to fix the problems; if you had a mind to; if you even could. This won't

banish either the major or the petty things about life that irk you; but, if only for a short while, they will be out of your head and on paper.

What to do with these lists and diatribes, you must be wondering? The items you can action personally, perhaps immediately, speak for themselves. Begin by picking one, preferably a task that you have been putting off because it's too hard or you aren't looking forward to. You'll probably groan at the thought, but if it has been plaguing you for some time, getting rid of it once and for all will make a huge difference. Other lesser matters will suddenly seem quite inconsequential by comparison and that will be a few more you can cross off the to-do list. As for the pages of dissatisfaction, maybe do with them what our next-door neighbour intends to do with her latest one. She is going to dig a hole in the garden and bury her frustration. And to get something extra-positive from the statement, she intends sticking a plant on top to let it worry about the problem that need then concern her no more.

So, get those problems and annoying notions out of your head and onto a piece of paper; and enjoy a decent night's sleep for a change.

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