

Don't worry! (It makes you ill)

By Robert Matthews



How to stop worrying, rumination and procrastination in order to regain health and happiness

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Chapter one - give your brain a break!

Do you spend a lot of time worrying? Do you suffer from serious or chronic illness? Are you someone who thinks things over a lot of the time? If you are, then read on...because *worrying is a useless pastime*, and not only that, it can make you seriously unhappy, it can make you ill, and it can stop you from recovering from illness. If *you* are a worrier you need to give your brain a break if you want to avoid or escape from illness. (There, that's something new for you to worry about!).

You need to become **a person of action rather than thought**.

No, not like James Bond! I am not referring simply to *physical* action, I am referring to 'doing' rather than thinking about doing. This may be a very tall order if you are already crippled by procrastination but do not let this prevent you from taking as many steps as you can to move in this direction as far as you possibly can. Good examples of people who "do more and think less" are very young children and primitive people. They naturally opt for action rather than thought.

Children tend to experience stress in short term bursts because they are focused, decisive and do not dwell on stressful thoughts. Short term stress, like excitement, is beneficial. Although the mind may be active during excitement, it is more relaxed, focused and the accompanying emotions are positive (as for example, in sport).

What you must avoid at all costs is a chronically over active thinking mind. The tendency to think everything over dozens of times before making a choice, decision or taking action is often referred to as *procrastination* or *indecisiveness*. This stems much more from *fear, caution or perfectionism* than idleness.

Some people habitually live in their thoughts all day long, thinking everything over, taking care before taking action, thinking things through and through, looking for solutions and answers by mulling things over. **This can be quite satisfying and addictive.** If ever this constant thinking pays dividends it can create an even stronger conviction that this is a good way to approach all decisions, problems, situations, in fact life in general.

In fact, it isn't a good way. You are more likely to make a good decision if you trust to your initial judgement or intuition than if you ponder over something for weeks on end. If you feel uncomfortable, or can't trust yourself to make any move without extensive thought, you are going to put a huge unnecessary burden on the mind.

These habits are even more likely in intense, ambitious people who are driven and determined to get on. Quite often a regular dose of self criticism is thrown in! There is a temptation to whip the brain even more relentlessly in a kind of frantic attempt to get answers, solutions, insights and to overcome hurdles, achieve expectations, and avoid repeating mistakes. A far cry from the relaxed mind of the tiny child.

The desire to get on and achieve can be accompanied by a state of almost **perpetual self awareness**, monitoring progress, thinking about yourself, your situation and relating everything to yourself.

This perpetual thinking isn't a good way to go through life because I believe for some there is a risk to health. The danger is that this kind of overactive mind can result in

an inability to relax as deeply or as often as others, resulting in a constant low level anxiety, worry or **stress**.

Is your mind resting enough?

By saying “avoid an overactive mind” I am not saying you should avoid concentration or focusing – quite the opposite. It is not at all unhealthy to have an active, enquiring mind, after all, do not small children so often seem to have them?

They have wonderful, natural powers of concentration. They do not spend hours each day self consciously ruminating, reflecting, planning and pushing their minds for answers! It is myth that concentration requires “effort” or “strain.” In pure focused concentration the mind begins to relax. Meditation is a good illustration of how pure focus and concentration relax the mind. The more a meditator focuses the quicker and deeper the feeling of relaxation. It is very similar in hypnotic induction. “Effort” and “strain” may sometimes be temporarily required to get into the state of concentration, but the pure state itself induces calm, which can be easily demonstrated by EEG monitoring.

People who “think too much” sometimes find they have lost their natural ability to concentrate and focus easily, and this may lead to them employing other strategies to make up for this loss, i.e. *more* thinking! Eventually they’d sooner work something out for themselves than learn something new!

Passive ‘input’ learning is not a strain on the mind. It requires concentration...this is what to aim for.

How I tried these techniques out on myself

I was so used to living in the world of ‘pipe dreams’, plans and analytical thoughts, that I found it surprisingly hard to stay grounded in the ‘now.’ I noticed that right from when I woke up in the mornings my mind would start churning. It became super active in no time. I was far too “self aware”, far too conscious of myself and of my situation.

Once I got underway everything changed.

So I focused off thought and onto ‘things’. I faced the hard work of focusing onto things that did not relate to me directly or to my thoughts; things that did not relate to my plans or situation, in any way. What things did I focus on instead?

- Tasks that required my full attention like chores I’d been putting off or making a low priority – all the stuff I’d always resented because it meant leaving the comfort zone, the “me” zone, the “thoughts” zone. It was a hard change. I committed myself to spending much more time, whenever possible to being entertained by passive pastimes such as films, music and television. I watched more documentaries, read far more novels and non fiction about things that interested me. I avoided anything that led my brain towards reflection, interpretation, plans or analysis.
- I focused on learning, i.e. the kind of learning where I needed to focus rather than analyse, interpret, question or struggle to learn. Just passive learning that required calm and even concentration, like learning a language. Passive input learning is not a strain on the mind. It requires a kind of relaxed concentration.

Remember, pure concentration does *not* involve strain. The effort or strain only occurs when you are trying too hard or when you have to force you force yourself to keep going or remain focused. If it becomes a strain then stop.

- Physically, I exercised more, going for short regular bursts.
- I avoided long stimulating discussions and debates. If you are addicted to regular analytical discussion with loved ones or friends then please try to phase out this habit until you have got out of the habit of chronic worrying - even if it entertains you. It may be a big part of your life, and feel like a massive loss, but you can steer conversation more towards light hearted stuff, relating events and so on. There's nothing wrong in being serious, but if being "serious" means being analytical and thoughtful...*don't be serious!*
- I modelled myself on young children and primitives! (with regard to how much time I spent dwelling in thought) This may seem crazy but using these extremes is the best way to give your mind a much needed rest.

At first I felt a bit bereaved of my old way of life when I did this. Bereaved of my former "cerebral" existence. I was afraid that if I put my thoughts, plans, and dreams to one side everything in my life would stop moving forward. I would be nothing but a passive, broken invalid with no hope, no direction, no plans to perfect, no meaning to my life.

I desperately wanted to revert back to indulging in my old thought centred existence, back to my old daylong habits that I missed so badly. I wanted to pick up where I'd left off to return to hope, to dreams, to the comfort of perfectionism and endlessly mulling everything over. It felt like I'd been away on a long holiday which I'd enjoyed to start with. A holiday where I'd been grounded, living in the moment, where I'd watched the sea for days, where I'd been entertained constantly...but now I was longing to return to the old familiarity, to return home to dwelling in thoughts, to myself, to plans, dreams and hopes.

Then I realised it was simply because I didn't want to face reality. I didn't want to face my true situation or abilities - returning to a "now" that I'd never been satisfied with. I'd been in the habit of living in my head to escape a reality. The world of excessive thinking, plans and hopes of a better future had protected me from facing myself and my life head on for years!

But I was convinced I had to achieve this if I was to find happiness and health. When I faced living in the present moment it felt depressing, a bit like I'd lost a huge part of what made up "me." It was like stepping off a "thought roller coaster" that I'd lived on since about the age of eight or nine. To be honest it was more like a persistent, slowly grinding machine than a roller coaster, but one that invariably kept repeating the same old circuits.

The hardest part

The hardest part for me was cutting out the habit of thinking things over almost all of the time. I began spending almost no time thinking things over. This was by far the most difficult bit of my campaign, it was like swallowing a very bitter pill; one I knew I had to swallow to get better.

I had no idea I'd been spending so much time in thought, so much time stewing on things, monitoring what I did, avoiding mistakes and being aware of myself. No idea that is, until I tried to put a stop to it. I kept using the way a young child approaches life as a rough model to help me, knowing that young children spend almost no time analysing, reflecting, thinking and planning. They just aim to get what they can out of each moment they find themselves in.

Calming down was hard too. I hadn't realised how hyper all that complex mental activity had made me. So I tried to deliberately relax mind and body whenever I remembered. I realised I was much more tense even just walking along than I'd realised. From time to time when walking, I'd deliberately relax my face, hands, stomach, shoulders...anywhere I noted tension. I'd imagine inanimate objects I was walking past had the magical power to relax me. I did the same thing with objects indoors and when people were around me. I'd imagine a cosy warm glow was beginning to fill me. It started working immediately and soon became a habit. I became much happier and more relaxed.

In my spare time alone I'd deliberately pick up a novel, do chores, watch a relaxing film. I started to "do" more and soon noticed that a new foundation of calm was beginning to form beneath everything. This was quite exciting! Even when excited, the foundation of calm remained.

I decided I was never going to let a stressful thought or episode get to me ever again

Above all, I decided I was going to do everything in my power to diffuse stress. Emotional pain is unavoidable pain sometimes, for example due to bereavement, a failed relationship, or even an argument. I was convinced I had no option but to revolutionise my ways of handling setbacks, worries and emotions. Either cope with those things 100% better than I had been doing in my life up till then, or face more chronic worry, tension.....and ultimately stress related illness.

..... simple choice

Emotional wounds are very like physical wounds in some respects. Some people give too much unneeded attention to physical wounds, fussing over them, staring at them, feeling excessive anger towards the perpetrator and feeling sorry for themselves. Even when the wounds are healing, they still look at them or interfere by picking at them.

The best thing to do with all wounds is to look away as soon as you possibly can and get on with life as best as you can. It's the looking away bit that takes strength and courage when the wounds are emotional. I had to dig much deeper than ever before to find that strength.

Emotional pain often cannot be ignored, and when no amount of action can be taken to remove it, the best thing to do is accept it fully. The trouble is that full acceptance then often transmutes into other emotions like anger or depression. These too must be accepted by finding the best strength you can muster to get on with life.

I was now using a lot more additional effort and strength into shrugging things off and getting on with life as best I could after setbacks....as a result I was convinced that I was becoming much happier and healthier.

I don't claim to have all the answers but I am certain that many of us need to learn how to cope with stress and worry far more in order to live happy, fulfilled lives and reach our full potential. Coping with stress and avoiding worrying are often as important as conventional medical in the treatment of illness. In my view it is absolutely *paramount* you learn how to deal with worry if you are to overcome many serious illnesses.

If you are ill...step back

In fact I believe that if you are afflicted with a serious illness you have no choice but to let go of all things stressful, whenever possible, because of how badly any stress affects the illness. This means not letting yourself get upset over social or environmental decline, injustice, politics and other big issues. The moment anything upsets or angers you, try to shrug it off or step back as if you were not involved – like a small child or someone who is detached or “amoral”. You may find this idea distasteful, extremely difficult or near impossible. If that is the case try to spend as little time dwelling on these matters as possible. Don’t feel guilty about stepping back; **you are doing it for the sake of your own health.**

I believe you have a choice, step back and let others take the pressure, do the worrying, crusading, arguing etc (if they will), or face the damage that worrying and stressing about these things will eventually do to you. You may be thinking: “Can’t I still get involved in those things but just not let them stress me, upset me or get to me?”

If you simply must to do something about issues that upset you – take some kind of swift action, then let the issue go. Be a person of decisive, impulsive action, not someone of thought, lengthy consideration or endless discussion.

You might feel as if stepping back is a waste of the powers of your mind, as if it is taking away a huge contribution you could make for the benefit of the world. You may feel you are stepping back from the real point of life, from the very pulse of everything that makes you tick. This is an illusion. You can still take decisive action; **all you are doing is stepping back from the world of thinking things over and over.** It is simply that you are becoming a carefree, relaxed, contented and easy going kind of person who doesn’t dwell on things and give them thought over long periods. This is essential if you are to break free from the clutches of serious illness. You need a permanent holiday from things you dwell on. It’s up to you.

Handling worry and uncertainty

If life’s setbacks are hard to cope with (and anyone with chronic or serious illness will know all about them) then “uncertainty” is an even greater challenge. Worry often occurs when there is no way of knowing if a setback will occur or not, for example, not knowing if a new disability will occur. This means you can neither *take action* to deal with the new disability, nor, if there is nothing that can be done about it, *accept* it. In other words, there is uncertainty.

The thing to do with uncertainty is to imagine two scenarios of the future and see yourself handling them both in an idealistic way. In the first scenario of the future, the thing you feared does *not* occur and you see yourself handling this easily. In the second scenario, the thing you fear *does* happen but you see yourself handling this in the most unbelievably good humoured, brave and accepting way. Obviously there is no way of knowing whether you would be able to actually handle the worst scenario that well, presumably you would do the best you could muster for your own sake. In other words just say to yourself :

“Whatever the future brings, whether it is sunshine or rain, from now on I will always do the very best I can muster. That is all I can ask of myself”

Knowing that, you might as well stop worrying! Worrying is a useless pastime...it just makes people sick. Stop worrying. Accept uncertainty. Life will always have uncertainties – so you are accepting life.

I never said it would be easy!

You are bound to find making these adjustments as tough as I did. I never said it was going to be easy! I never said you wouldn't need to dig deep and find tremendous patience or face endurance. I fully expect that at some stage, you may doubt whether it will all be worth it, whether you really will begin to find health and happiness. You may doubt whether employing new strategies and more effort to deal with stress and relaxing your overactive mind will make any difference to your health or happiness.

But don't you realise? The harder you find it to make these adjustments the more obvious it is that you needed to make them. If you spend the rest of your life indulging in endless analytical thought; being overly conscious of yourself; and taking everything to heart, you will never be happy anyway.

There is no point in doing this half heartedly.....it is all or nothing. It's hard to change - to change the mental habits of a lifetime - but not impossible.

Remember, give your brain a rest!

Making the most of "now"

As I committed myself more to these changes, the depression started to lift, I was like a child who had started at a new school where there was no time for thoughts or home sickness, only focusing on what was happening right now. I got used to the new school and found it wasn't so bad.

Then came the realisation that it *was* a better way of living, not just better, it was wonderful! It was life! I felt like lifting up my arms to accept and welcome the moment that I was in (mind you that would have been pretentious!) No, I hadn't turned into a Buddhist or gone all spiritual but there were strong similarities:

I had accepted that the present moment is good enough to be worth being in, rather than living in the world of thoughts about other moments, other things.

I accepted who I was, rather than thinking about who I used to be or how I'd like to be.

I accepted how I looked, my age, my situation... everything.

I accepted that it was okay to feel good, regardless of whatever stage I was at in any journey or project, rather than wait for completion before I'd allow that.

This did not mean that I'd suddenly lost my will or motivation to improve my life. Far from it, I knew I would continue to do the best I could possibly muster to improve things, its just that in the meantime I would *make the most of now*. I wasn't turning into a follower of Eckhart Tolle, or hoping to lose my sense of individuality or "self", but simply making the most of whatever moment I was in.

"Make the most of now" became a mantra I could not get out of my head. I no longer used "now" to stress or indulge in endless periods of thought...that was a poor use of "now"; in fact it was not living in "now" at all.

Whatever I found myself doing I started to make the most of, rather than wait for a better time. or challenging the existence of "the self" For example, when

walking along a street, I'd start to relax into the moment, focus on what was pleasant, be more aware of the colours around me, more aware of what all my senses were giving me. In the past I always found something to be negative about, "things weren't as good as they used to be, or should be." Then I realised that may be true, but even if and when things are in decline or getting worse, it still makes sense to just make the most of whatever is there in that moment. Don't wait for a better time, place or moment.

On one occasion I found myself going over and over why I hadn't worked this all out years ago? Why hadn't I seen the sense of this in the past? As I dwelled on this thought I realised I was slipping back to old habits so I just let it go! This is an example of how tough it can be to stop analysing everything. How hard it can be to stop being reflective and analytical all the time. Stop being a perfectionist, stop being hard on yourself for making mistakes or poor decisions.

All that pointless self recrimination had just made me ill, so I let go of being an analytical being. I was letting go of an addiction, an addiction that had once seemed like a friend. My ability to think the way I did had even convinced others that I was smart - after all natural, more down to earth people often admire those who are compulsively analysing everything. Finally, I had realised this thinking habit was my worst enemy.

I used to believe that being a thinker meant I was "smart"

I hope as you read this you are able to see how you *must* let go of constantly thinking things over and live in the present moment. I once lived with a girlfriend who used to listen with admiration as I spilled out the contents of my ever churning mind for hours on end. I noticed she could take part in hearing about my plans or intellectualising things but then just break off and give her brain a break. When she wanted to she'd break off easily and quickly focus fully on a film or book. I, on the other hand, often found such a transition much harder and envied her ability. **My brain would carry on whirring like a flywheel**, unable to stop all the activity and output, whereas she could switch to concentration/input/relaxation mode at the drop of a hat.

In fact, the inability and sometimes reluctance to switch easily into concentration mode was the story of my life. Even in my early schooldays I'd often use my ability to think things over as a cover up or compensation for inability to concentrate easily.

I am now totally convinced that gradually, over the years from about eight years old onwards, I had slowly been debilitating my mind and body and preventing myself from experiencing true happiness. I realise that not all people who are addicted to thought and perfectionism are the same. It is obviously only a minority of such people who will actually make themselves ill through habitual worry or rumination. Just as say, not all people who eat too many sweets will necessarily get tooth decay – there are obviously other factors involved.

I am convinced that perpetual, slightly stressed thinking eventually does begin to affect the brain because it has not yet evolved to cope with such an extreme "cerebral" existence

I took every opportunity to relax

So I took every opportunity to relax as much as I could. I threw myself into reading books, watching films, into shallower, more light hearted conversation.

I developed the knack of shrugging things off when they upset me and focusing off them, even to the point where I deliberately shrugged physically. I was no longer hard on myself over mistakes or poor decisions. I let things go.

I modelled myself on my interpretation of the natural mind of the young child or primitive. I encouraged myself to be spontaneous. I also did everything I could to keep my body relaxed whatever I did, wherever I went.

As you read this right now, stop for a moment and go on a “mental tour” of your body noting where there is most tension. See what I mean? You might want to close your eyes as you do this exercise if it makes it easier. Once you have located the areas of tension, just relax the them as much as you can. Some people find it easier to deliberately tense up muscles more before relaxing them. A tense body results in a tense mind and vice versa, but by relaxing as much as you can every time you notice tension you are breaking this vicious circle.

Break off from things when mind gets tired,

Break off when you notice mind is tired or is straining. Make no exceptions.

Have a regular massage

There is nothing like massage to ease away residual tension that has built up in the body. There are types of massage that can release very deep, built up tension, such as neuromuscular therapy - sometimes referred to as trigger point therapy. I believe massage that eases away long standing “knots” in muscle and connective tissue can be of tremendous benefit to everyone, so long as it is performed by a qualified practitioner.

Spontaneity...

One way of leaving the comfort zone of thinking, of mulling things over is to become more spontaneous. Again, young children are a good model in this respect. They don't think about things long before they get on and do things. They make impulse decisions or make up their minds quickly. Of course they make mistakes but they have not yet learned to question everything and be hard on themselves when they have made mistakes. In the end they learn to think more, but in some case, as they grow older they take thinking to the other extreme and lose all spontaneity.

If you have gone to this other extreme, practice being more spontaneous in your decisions and in general. Practice risking mistakes, and allow yourself to make occasional mistakes. It may feel risky, irresponsible, like a pointless waste of your powers of reasoning, like changing your basic personality...so be it! **You get further in life by learning from mistakes than simply trying to avoid them all the time.** Remember this advice is not given here for the sake of self improvement but also in the interests of health.

Ask yourself, why are you so afraid of standing by your initial, spontaneous, gut instinct decisions? Maybe you are afraid of relying on your basic intelligence, afraid of facing the true level of your minds ability. You would rather go over things again and again as a safety net, than face the true ability of your mind.

The constant stress and strain and pressure this puts on your poor brain is just not worth it, you are better off accepting your own level, allowing the odd mistake or disappointment rather than relying on thinking all the time to somehow keep you ahead of everyone else!

In fact you will find that you get *more* done, that you make less mistakes, that you are happier, healthier and calmer.

Meditation

Thinking about things and thinking things over stops proper focusing. Probably one of the most powerful changes you can make is to learn meditation. Most meditation involves ignoring the constant chatter of the mind and is usually obtained by focusing on one single thing, e.g. a candle flame or a mantra. A common misconception about meditation, especially amongst the young, is that it is “running away from life.” Nothing could be less true, it is about engaging fully with life, returning to the present, connecting with what *is*.

It is also an empowerment. The mind becomes more alert and relaxed, not just during the exercise but all the time. Your mind will also become quicker and clearer and you will sleep more deeply and easily. People who spend most of their days dwelling in thoughts often find meditation excruciatingly difficult to do or hard to keep up...all the more reason you need to learn it! It will teach you how to ignore the endless chain of obsessive thoughts.

‘Wild horse’ analogy

If you are still not completely sold on meditation think of the following analogy:

A wild horse from the prairies is captured but never relaxes in captivity. All day long its mind is restless and nervous. The horse bucks and will allow no one to go near it. Each night it sleeps as deeply as all the other horses, but remains restless during the daytime. Eventually they decide to calm the horse down. They attach a lead to it and encourage it to go round in circles for half an hour every day. At first there is little or no change, but gradually the horse becomes calm *during* the exercise. A few days later it *remains* calm after the exercise and remains so throughout the rest of the day.

Your mind is like that wild horse. You may believe that sleep is all your mind needs to be replenished, calm and relaxed the next day, but just like the horse, that is not the case. Meditation has a different role completely to sleep, that’s why one good time to meditate is when you have risen in the morning. Just like training that horse, **you are training your mind to stay relaxed when you are wide awake.** In fact going round and round in a circle *is* a kind of meditation from the horse’s point of view

If you practice meditation on a regular basis you will eventually be able to relax your mind all day long, wherever you go, whoever is around you, just like the horse! Incidentally do not confuse being “mental relaxation” with being mentally or physically slow, tired or dozy. Relaxed is a frequently misunderstood word. Think of a professional tennis player who is tense in the first set and then relaxes in the second. As soon as he relaxes s/he is an unstoppable opponent, running round much faster, his/her mind much quicker and faster.

In case you think a lot of this advice sounds like adopting a kind of “Eastern” or “Asian” mentality” you are right!

When nothing can be done – accept and merge with emotions.

It is tempting to try and resource the incredible thinking power of the mind to find a way of escaping or avoiding inevitable emotional pain. Don’t fight it, dwell on it, or analyse it so much. When no action can be taken to avoid or

alleviate such emotions try to accept any pain or unpleasantness fully and stoically. Be with that pain or emotion, feel it fully. Be honest with yourself, sometimes you will realise that anger, for example, is anger at yourself for not dealing better with a situation or person. Even if you are upset or disappointed with yourself accept that pain and move on without spending a lot of time developing strategies to avoid future mistakes or mishaps.

The way to accept things such as emotional pain, is to carry on with life as best as you can. In the very short term this may seem to magnify the pain. It isn't easy doing this if you are accustomed to licking wounds or analysing things for lengthy periods. Obviously you need to briefly deal with the pain as best as you can, but after this the best thing you can do for yourself is to carry on with your day, your situation, your life. Sometimes letting something go or accepting something results in a temporary feeling of humiliation, loss or depression. The best thing to do in this case is to do your best to go through this unpleasantness as best you can. Picking the matter up again and going over it again and again in your mind is not letting go. It is not the solution. Letting something go by carrying on with life is the solution.

Of course I do not want you to “bury” emotions – that is not dealing with them. If you really can't resolve something quickly then seeking help such as counselling may help. But in my opinion you should keep this as brief as possible. Do your best to come to terms with things, or understand them as quickly as possible, then let them go of baggage as soon as you can.

Thinking things over is *not* the solution to everything

You may be afraid that letting go without lengthy thought is taking a “risk” of incurring similar emotional pain in the future, or repeating mistakes. In that case *a brief resolution or decision* of some kind is fine but then you have to let go and trust to your gut feeling at the time and your memory to recall it if needed in the future! Coming to terms with things and letting go as soon as you can because it is essential you stop the habit of dwelling on stressful things. Develop the knack of letting things go and shrugging them off as quickly as you can.

Be careful of strategies that involve hope as they often prolong suffering and mental turmoil. Dodging pain is not accepting it. Sometimes it may be useful to think of children or primitive people as “role models” in this regard. They tend to face and accept pain fully and completely and as a result move on much more quickly, with as little thought as possible. Think of them and you will learn far better than you could ever do from me how to handle life, for example, emotional pain. You can try applying this to emotions such as anger, pain, disappointment, heartache and so on when appropriate. Facing getting on with everyday life is often the best way to take that pain fully, i.e. stopping dwelling in thoughts and returning to the “now.”

Whatever stage you are at in ‘the journey from here to better or worse’ make the most of where you are right now, and that applies to every second of your life. Don't just plan to “live in the now” someday in the future when or if times are good, or when things are underway or better.... live there all the time!

In short....

Avoid stress, learn to cope better with unavoidable stress, and rest your chronically over active mind! It is vital that you start living more in the present; that you become more laid back, easy going, carefree, less driven, compromising, tolerant, accepting, less sensitive, easier on the self and so on. I believe it is also essential to start a permanent holiday from mulling

things over, procrastination and pointless worrying. Give the brain a rest and just live a far less anxious, more primitive, right brained life over a sustained period.

Life is mostly for “doing” not mostly for thinking things over.

Fundamental change in thinking is like fundamental change in personality. You don't have to become a counsellor to realise how rare it is for anyone to fundamentally change. It's rare but it can be done. It may be tough but remember this is not only in the name of “self development”; it is also for the sake of your health.

All of the above may seem like a lot to digest or remember, so in the next chapter there is a 24 point summary of these ideas for easy reference.

Chapter two: a summary of how you can start using the power of your mind to “switch off” and “let go”

- 1. Make it an absolute priority to live as stress free a life as possible and learn better ways of coping with stress, setbacks and emotional ups and downs. This is paramount.
- 2. Change the 'serial thinking', 'mental churning' and 'straining the mind' habits you are addicted to. Trust more to your intuition. Allow yourself to make mistakes and let them go.
- 3. Live a more basic, primitive, 'right brained' and physical existence. Live much more in the 'now'. Go for a laid back mental life. Mental input is fine as long as there is no strain. Cut down on mental output that is not spontaneous and natural.
- 4. Relax into 'now'. Don't wait for a better time to do this. Make the most of every moment in every day as you journey through life, whether it is a journey from here to better, to worse or just to more of same.
- 5. Avoid getting “hyper” at all costs, i.e. worked up through any kind of mental activity for days or weeks on end. Many things can put you in this kind of state, for example work, anxiety, upset, obsessions, fear, or even excitement. These emotions are beneficial for brief periods but cause key damage in the long term.
- 6. Meditate every day whenever possible (pure concentration is the absolute opposite to thinking). Alternatively use visualisation or self hypnosis techniques – often available as downloads or on CDs - anything that gradually trains the mind to remain calm while fully alert.
- 7. Merge with the world rather than stay self conscious, aloof or brooding. Avoid self centred thoughts - develop the habit of focusing your thoughts off yourself.
- 8. Regularly 'lose' yourself in entertainment, films, music, novels, beauty, exercise, dance or whatever you can physically still do....even though you are tempted to use spare time for thinking.
- 9. Go for 'passive input learning' rather than analytical study or activities.
- 10. Rely more on impulses, intuition, and spontaneity - even if it means making occasional mistakes. Stop analysing and being indecisive! Keep problem solving exercises to short bursts.
- 11. End perfectionism - (becoming more compromising and accepting is far more 'perfect!')
- 12. Stop being hard on yourself. See accepting mistakes as part of being successful. Remember the slogan: 'double your losses to double your gains'. Do not beat yourself up over mistakes or spend ages dwelling on things.
- 13. Stop thinking things over constantly in an effort to understand things, make them better or to avoid making or repeating mistakes. It might be slowly killing you. This thinking habit may occasionally have worked for you in the past...but that might just have fooled you into believing it was the winning

formula (like a gambler who swears by gambling, based on winning the jackpot once or twice).

- 14. “Change what you can change and accept what you can't.” When you face obstacles, set backs or upsets, either take decisive action or fully accept what you can't change.
- 15. Do not use prolonged thinking and analysing as a technique for solving everything or, for competing with people who seem to absorb information quickly or who come up with answers with little effort, (even if it convinces others, or yourself, into believing you have the same gifts). Once you stop stewing in thought you will discover you have your *own* natural gifts for memory and quick solutions.
- 16. Avoid loneliness whenever possible. Take every opportunity to 'stop thinking' and focus off yourself.
- 17. Be quicker to shrug things off and accept your short comings without mulling over strategies to improve.
- 19. Rest the mind - sleep, relax, nap, visualise, perform tasks and activities that require as little analytical thought as much as possible. If you have to stress out your mind - frequent breaks are absolutely essential.
- 20. Try to become a person of action rather than thought (unless you are held back by physical disability, but even then, do the maximum you can). Stop thinking...start doing!
- 21. Be decisive. Allow yourself mistakes rather than spend a lifetime trying to avoid them through the deployment of extra thought.
- 22. Make deep, regular massage a priority.
- 23. Exercise and excitement are fine – just don't overdo them or let them turn into stress.
- 24. Finally, they say that laughter is the best medicine in any illness and studies have shown there is a lot of truth in this. The trouble is, if you suffer from pain, depression and disability...they are no laughing matter. In disaster films there always seems to be someone who can make themselves and others feel better by seeing the funny side in the worst situations, if you think you can be one of those lucky people...go for it.

Conclusion

Escaping from old ways could be the greatest escape of your life

I know, these changes are a tall order when we are so accustomed to being full of thoughts, anxiety, hope or a whole combination of constant excessive mental stimulation. It is hard if you are addicted to the old 'thinking out the answers to everything' way of life. Losing that way of life may see like losing 'you', your very consciousness, but as you abandon dwelling in the world of thought and stress I know you will regain joy and contentment. A contentment you may never have experienced, or not have experienced since being a very small child.

It's not easy changing - I know that people rarely change. It is even harder to do if you have a crippling illness.

Remember this book is a very subjective view. I hope it has motivated you to make it a much bigger priority to avoid stress and cope better with unavoidable stress and negative emotions. And remember, life is mostly for "doing" not mostly for thinking things over.

Good luck, and please keep in touch and let me know how you are getting on,

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London September 2008

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