

To think or not to think?

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology*

BY MATHILDA WATERS



According to our expert on well-being, Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology, thinking can be both good and bad for you.

MW: My friends often tell me that I think too much. Is that even possible?

Dr. DD: Just as our lungs breathe, and our hearts beat, our brains think. So there is nothing wrong about thinking per se. However, there are different ways of thinking, and some are better than others.

MW: What kind of thinking is not good for you?

Dr. DD: You could say that OBSESSIVE thinking is not so good for you. When you obsess, or worry excessively, your mind is very busy repeating itself. It gets stuck on a loop without producing useful results. It's sort of like working relentlessly for very little reward.

MW: Why do we obsess?

Dr. DD: Some people feel more in control if they constantly rehearse the same worries. They might worry that they are going to forget things, or that if they stop worrying, they will be unprepared for something bad. Others might be busy in their heads to avoid unpleasant feelings in their bodies. Anxiety always comes with unpleasant bodily sensations. And because you can't feel the thoughts in your brain itself (the brain has no feeling receptors), it's a good place to escape from unpleasant sensations. Other people might obsess out of habit, simply because that's what they've always done.

MW: Interesting! I think I like worrying because it makes me feel more in control. Can't thinking a lot be useful?

Dr. DD: Of course. When you are in a PROBLEM SOLVING mode of thinking, you can be completely immersed in a flow of thought that runs at the same high speed as the obsessive thinking. The difference however, and it's a big difference, is that once the problem is solved, you move on to the next problem. If you can't solve a problem, you might put it aside for the time being, and work on a problem you can solve. In essence, you produce results, which is typically a pleasurable reward for the effort you put into thinking. This kind of thinking might tire you, but it will typically be a much more satisfying experience, just like physical labour can be satisfying if it's productive and well rewarded.

MW: So it's not about how busy your mind is, but whether your thinking produces useful results?

Dr. DD: That's right. There are times when you have to work hard with your mind, and there is nothing wrong with that. That's what the mind is for.

MW: What about those who claim that slowing your mind is beneficial?

Dr. DD: Slowing down your mind can be very good for you. When your frontal lobes are over-activated, you tend to be less aware of the world around you and of the feelings inside you. When you slow your thinking, your senses tend to open up and you can experience the world and yourself much more astutely. You will also generally be able to relax your muscles, sleep better, and be happier when your mind slows down.

MW: Do you mean slow down or stop altogether?

Dr. DD: Either. A CONTEMPLATIVE mode of thought is when your mind is more like an aimless wanderer, an observer without an agenda to change or solve anything, just taking note of things and reflecting on your observations. This is a very pleasurable mode that should be practiced on a regular basis. To take it one step further, when you practice meditation, yoga, focussing, etc, you might be able to shut down your thinking altogether, and be completely PERCEPTUALLY IMMersed in the internal and external world. This is another state of mind that makes life worth living.

MW: To tell you the truth, I don't think I have experienced this kind of "non-thinking" state you are talking about. Any hope for someone like me?

Dr. DD: You should be able to get there if you are willing to learn. It is usually helpful to find a coach to guide you in the initial stages of that journey, because it is difficult to overcome the all-too-common habit of being busy with obsessive thoughts. Once you learn the necessary techniques, you can add contemplative thinking or perceptual immersion to your 'modes of being' repertoire. I would highly recommend either of these for the health and pleasure value.

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