

Rumination's Kryptonite: Singing a Tune

By [SARAH NEWMAN, MA](#)

Have you ever found yourself stuck on a thought? You may be replaying an argument you had with your spouse — or even imagining an argument you might have with them. You may be thinking about that time you said something wrong and made a fool out of yourself at a dinner party. Maybe you're thinking about the time you stuck your foot in your mouth in front of your boss. You might just be upset that you tripped in front of other people on your way into work this morning.

This is called rumination. Not only is it a huge time-waster, it's demeaning and lowers self-esteem. Perhaps you're worried these things may happen again or you're just berating yourself. You might imagine what it would have been like if you had said the right thing or did something differently. But rumination fails to make us feel better and it can't change the past or the future.

Years ago, I realized that I was very rarely listening to my friends or my husband if we went out for drinks or sat down to dinner. If I watched a movie or a TV show, I wasn't really paying attention. Instead, I was rolling over the past in my mind over and over again.

I was living in a negative fantasy and missing the present moment. I was on a treadmill of rumination and instead of burning calories I was fattening up my anxiety and depression.

How do we end up being so hard on ourselves? Maybe it's perfectionism. We hold ourselves to a different standard than others. We think we should never make a social faux pas, and we can't forgive ourselves when we do. Our ego isn't just bruised; it's trampled, kicked, punched and thrown off a mountain.

Rumination drives home feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment and makes us believe we are actually defective. It's irrational because the idioms "sticking your foot in your mouth" and "making a fool out of yourself" were coined long before we flubbed anything.

So how do we stop the cycle? Well, I found an interesting solution. It not only stops rumination, it also stops me from perfectionist over-planning and obsessive worry and can even help me bounce back when I feel hurt or angry after an interaction: Singing.

I had a friend staying with me in 2009, and every morning when he showered he'd sing. After a while, I noticed he sang often throughout the day. If he was making a sandwich or putting on his shoes he'd hum a tune or just sing about what he was doing. Of course my friend Sam is a musician, so it's not surprising he's so musical. But after he left, I found myself singing in the shower, too.

By the time I rinsed the shampoo out of my hair, I discovered I had just had my first whole shower where I didn't ruminate at all. In fact I didn't think about anything other than what I was singing. Furthermore, filling my head with song made me feel happier. I was like a Disney princess (albeit a considerably tone-deaf one).

Singing can stop the ball rolling when you begin to ruminate. Another nice trick to keep in your back pocket is the memory of at least one time you made a superior impression on someone. Think of a time you met someone and they saw you in a positive light and immediately seemed to like you.

Keep that memory in your arsenal. For every bad impression you might have made on someone else, there are twice as many times when you made a good or neutral impression on another person. Furthermore, every bad impression or mistake you've ever made was a lesson learned and it made you wiser. It's the [Law of Opposites](#).

Rumination never made me feel happy or more confident. It never saved me from making future mistakes, and it never helped me to cope with embarrassment. It served me in no way.

Perhaps the saddest thing about rumination is that it consumes us so fully and yet other people aren't even paying that close attention to the mistakes we make. People are more concerned with themselves and their own lives.

No one expects you to be perfect. You shouldn't expect that, either. Be kind to yourself and roll with mistakes. You'll find that you don't make that many.