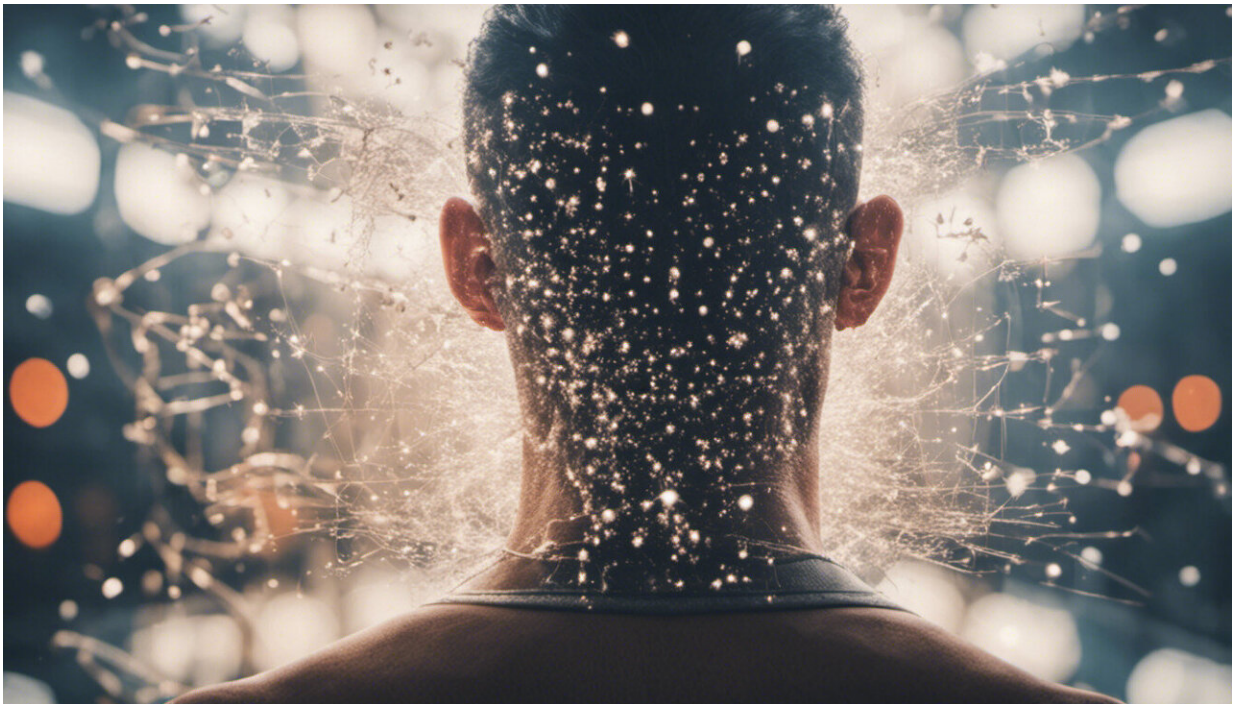


# How to overcome repetitive negative thinking through meditation

July 13 2023, by Anna Andrianova

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Do you ever find yourself caught in a cycle of negative thoughts? Maybe you ruminate on past mistakes, worry excessively about the future, or imagine worst-case scenarios?

Do you sometimes have a great day, everything goes well, and then your

brain says, "Hey, remember that time you embarrassed yourself in front of everyone? Let's relive that moment for the next 20 minutes." And suddenly, your good day turns into a cringe-fest.

If so, know that you're not alone. Many people struggle with repetitive negative thinking, and this can have a serious impact on [mental health](#) and well-being.

As the coordinator of expertise in caregiving at the [Centre for Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology](#) and an associate member of the [Centre for Study and Research on India, South Asia and its Diaspora](#), I would like to shed light on the negative impact of repetitive negative thinking on the mental and physical health of caregivers.

## **The devastating effects of repetitive negative thinking**

[Repetitive negative thinking \(RNT\)](#) is a [cognitive process](#) characterized by persistent and intrusive contemplation on past events, commonly known as rumination, and apprehensions about future possibilities, often referred to as worries.

RNT is a recurring, unwelcome, and difficult to dislodge pattern of thinking that has been implicated in the onset and perpetuation of diverse mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, and [post-traumatic stress disorder](#). Furthermore, [RNT has been found to be associated with physical health and has been linked to an increased likelihood of future health issues](#). RNT may negatively [impact one's quality of sleep, decrease efficiency, and hinder decision-making abilities](#).

Recent studies have revealed that the severity of RNT is connected with [changes in brain morphology](#), leading to a decline in general cognitive abilities and increasing the [risk of developing Alzheimer's disease](#). Even

at low levels, RNT can have [detrimental effects on the cardiovascular, autonomic nervous, and endocrine systems](#).

So, what would be the most effective strategy for managing repetitive negative thinking? [Research has demonstrated a negative correlation between RNT and mindfulness](#), implying that a low level of mindfulness can increase one's susceptibility to RNT.

## **Journey to the present: The transformative power of mindfulness**

Mindfulness can be seen as a mental faculty or skill that can be developed through regular practice. It entails cultivating [a non-judgmental and non-reactive awareness of the present moment](#). The objective is to be fully engaged in what's happening right now, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

There are two main styles of mindfulness practice: [focused attention meditation and open monitoring meditation](#). Focused attention meditation involves choosing a specific object, such as the breath, and bringing your full attention to it. Whenever the mind wanders, it is simply brought back to the object of focus. In contrast, open monitoring meditation involves being aware of everything occurring in the present moment. Instead of trying to focus on a specific object, one simply observes whatever arises in the experience, including thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations.

But what's happening in the brain during these practices? Recent studies have revealed that only during focused attention meditation, there is a [deactivation of the "default mode network"](#)—a network of brain areas that are typically active when we're not focused on any particular task. This network is implicated in "resting-state" thinking, which involves

repetitive negative thinking. By deactivating the "default mode network," focused attention meditation can help reduce this harmful type of thinking.

## **Reducing repetitive negative thinking: A breakthrough for caregivers**

As part of [our project](#), we will develop and examine an [intervention](#) targeted at reducing RNT in family caregivers.

According to a [recent report](#), over eight million Canadians aged 15 and older, or 25 percent of the population, provide care to a family member or friend with a long-term health condition, disability, or aging-related needs.

While caregiving can be rewarding, it can also be challenging and stressful, particularly for those who provide extensive or complex care. [Chronic stress](#) is a common experience for family caregivers, and it can take a toll on their health and well-being. [A survey of caregivers](#) found that the top areas of need for caregivers were emotional health (58 percent) and physical health (32 percent). [RNT is strongly associated with caregiver burden](#) and predicts negative impacts on the physical and mental health of caregivers.

We will recruit 100 caregivers with high levels of RNT. The intervention will be presented to participants in the form of interactive videos that guide them through the practice of focused attention meditation. We will measure changes in RNT, stress, anxiety, depression, and quality of life before and after the intervention, as well as at a six-month follow-up.

If the intervention is effective, it could serve as the basis for the development of an innovative tool for monitoring and reducing RNT.

This tool could be deployed as a [mobile app](#) or on virtual reality platforms, providing caregivers with access to an intervention that they can use at their convenience. This could significantly expand the reach of the intervention, making it more accessible and convenient for caregivers who may not have the time or resources to participate in traditional face-to-face interventions.

Overall, the potential of the focused attention meditation intervention to improve the mental and [physical health](#) of caregivers, as well as the development of new innovative tools, represents a promising avenue in the field of [caregiver](#) support services. Further research and implementation of such interventions could significantly improve the quality of life for caregivers and the people they care for.

After all, to echo the words of philosopher Marcus Aurelius, "the happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts."

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