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"How To Turn Off Your Mental Autopilot"

Hi, Alex here with this week's video. And today I've got a quick idea that I think will help you to stop a lot of the negative thoughts you catch yourself having throughout the day.

I've called this video "How To Turn Off Your Mental Autopilot."

Let me start by asking you this: "Do you often catch yourself having random thoughts that you'd rather not be having?" I know I Do. And I don't just mean the terrible, panicky thoughts. This can also just be silly thoughts that really mean nothing at all. It's probably safe to assume *all* people experience this kind of thing.

Daydreams, fantasies, playing out scenarios in your head of upcoming events. We *all* have those, all the time. Even more than you'd think when you start taking notice of them.

We all have these thoughts, all the time, and for someone who *doesn't* have a problem with anxiety and panic, it doesn't really do any harm. But for those of us who *do* have a problem with anxiety and panic, these random and often subconscious thoughts can lead to more harmful and damaging thoughts.

And that's sometimes the first step on the way to a panic attack. Or at the least, to increased anxiety.

So because it's clear that these random, unimportant thoughts can lead to problems, I started looking at them more closely. I knew if we could *stop* these thoughts from ever happening, or stop them earlier on, then the anxiety and panic that they can lead to would also stop.

Before I go any further, I'll just give you a quick example of a series of these random, unintended thoughts, so that you have a clear picture of what I mean. And this example is one of my own, from earlier this week.

A few days ago I was a passenger in someone's car. It was rush hour, so there were cars and trucks and people everywhere. Horns were blaring in every direction - it was a typical, stressful, unpleasant rush hour, like always.

So as the traffic started to slowly move along, a car came from nowhere. It swerved up over the kerb, swung around us, and cut in front, taking our place. If you're anything like me when something like that happens, then you'll probably get angry. I guess everyone does.

So I got angry. This car almost hit us, drove up over the kerb close to people walking, took our spot, and then continued on like nothing had happened.

So here's the next few thoughts I had, as best as I remember them.

First of all, I wanted to get a look at the driver. Was it a man, a woman, a young kid? I wanted to know *who'd* driven like such an idiot.

But it was dark, and the angles were wrong, so I couldn't see.

The next thought I had was that I wish there'd been a police car around at the time to see it happen. So then I looked around at the lanes of cars around me, hoping to see a police car. But obviously there wasn't one.

By this time the traffic was moving slowly again, and unbelievably this car in front did the same thing *again*. As a gap appeared in front, this car pulled up over the kerb, drove alongside a couple of people walking there, and swerved into the space ahead.

So all the while this is happening, it's hard to escape thoughts of this driver. We're stuck there in traffic, going nowhere, and this car that's driving like a maniac is right there in front of me.

And *more* thoughts begin.

I imagined scenarios where I got out of the car and walked up to whoever this was driving this way, and I imagined knocking on their window and telling them what I thought of them.

I imagined *other* drivers getting out and doing it *instead* of me. And then I imagined the crazy driver's reactions to this - in some scenarios he was sorry and that made me feel better. In other scenarios he was aggressive and that led to thoughts of what horrible outcomes *that* might lead to.

Do you see how crazy and out of control these silly thoughts can become?

This was some random driver who I'd never met before and would never meet again. He annoyed me slightly by driving dangerously and taking our space. And within 60 seconds of this happening, I'd had dozens of thoughts about him.

Some funny, some scary, some even *violent*.

Absolutely nothing had happened. And nothing *would* happen. I'm not the kind of person who would ever get out of a car and knock on someone else's window to tell them how terrible their driving is and what an idiot I think they are.

I'm not the kind of person who would *do* that, so why am I the kind of person who would *think* that?

The truth is, we're *all* the kind of people who would think that. We all think *everything*. We imagine every scenario, every outcome, and we can do all this in seconds, even without noticing that we're doing it.

This robs our mental energy, keeps us permanently on edge, and clutters our minds with thoughts that just don't matter.

And these things can start *anywhere*.

Last week I spoke to you about how toxic the news can be, and how something you see on a news report can kick off trains of thought like this. *Anything* can cause them:

A single thought, a memory of something someone said years ago, something you read, a song, a picture. *Anything*.

And when something starts one of these trains of thought off, your mind goes into autopilot, and that's why I called this video "How To Turn Off Your Mental Autopilot." These things set your mind on autopilot, and the next thing you know, 10 minutes have passed and you've spent the entire time thinking destructive thoughts you weren't even aware you were having.

So the next question is, "How *do* you turn off your mental autopilot?"

Actually, it's pretty easy. You just flip the switch off - by *acknowledging* them.

I know that sounds crazy, but it really is that simple. With these thoughts we're talking about - the ones that get started off by something small and then carry on

undetected for minutes at a time - with these kinds of thoughts we really *do* have the power to just stop them anytime we want.

That's what I've found since I started looking at this.

Take my example above, about the annoying dangerous driver. What *finally* caused me to stop thinking about that whole thing? Well, I stopped those thoughts because I caught myself *having* them, and that was it.

And that seems to be the way it is with these kinds of thoughts.

At the start of this video, I asked you if you ever catch yourself having random thoughts that you'd rather not be having. And I'm sure you do. And I'm also sure that when you *catch* yourself having them, that almost always stops the thoughts in question.

Even though these thoughts don't *seem* to be damaging on the surface, they almost *always* lead into negative thoughts, or unpleasant outcomes in our minds. So the less of them we have, the healthier our minds will be.

And if the way to *stop* them is to catch yourself in the act of *having* them, then the key here is to take much more notice of your thoughts.

Instead of just coasting along while your mind wanders anywhere it chooses, make a point of asking yourself from time to time what you're thinking about at that exact moment.

I've been doing this for a while, and I've been doing it even *more* the past few days since I knew this was the subject of this video today, and I'm amazed at what I catch myself thinking. And I've also been amazed at how powerless most of these thoughts are.

Most of them are gone the moment I become aware of them.

And that actually makes this process addictive. When you realise how many negative and unnecessary thoughts you're preventing, simply by questioning what's on your mind from time to time, you'll probably develop a new habit, like I have. A habit of keeping track of your thoughts like you never have before, and *stopping* those thoughts you really have no need or desire to be having.

So do your best to put this into action over the next few days - take a look at your thoughts from time to time, see what you're thinking, and make a habit of it. The more you do this, the less of these thoughts you'll ever have in the first place.

I hope you'll find a minute to leave me a comment down below to let me know how this idea's worked for you. And you can also let me know if there are any particular thoughts you realise you've been having all this time.

It can be really helpful to compare things like this. It can help us to catch things we might have missed. So I'm definitely looking forward to hearing from you this week.

And I'm also looking forward to speaking to you again *next* week. So have a great few days, and I'll speak to you again soon.

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