What, Me Worry?  
How to Worry Less and Enjoy Life More

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Worry

• A sense of uneasiness and anxiety
• A repetitive and pervasive dwelling on difficulties or troubles
• A complex form of fear derived from feeling vulnerable and powerless
• “Productive worry,” that leads to solutions, can be beneficial.
• “Unproductive worry” can cause life problems, varying from mild discomfort, to periodic problems, to a strong and severe component of a mental illness like anxiety or depression.
• Worry is a bio-psycho-social behavior that can be changed.

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**Unproductive Worry**

- Negative worry involves negative thinking, self-doubt, physical anxiety, foreboding, and fear.
- It can keep us in constant stress.
- It can disrupt our sleep patterns.
- It can hamper our actions and interfere with our life goals.
- It can exhaust and exasperate our friends and family.
- It can impair our thinking and have detrimental physical effects to our heart, immune system, digestive system, blood chemistry.

**In the Brain . . .**

- We now understand how the brain generates and sustains worry.
- Once fear hits the cerebral cortex, we add in anticipation, memory, emotion, and imagination.
- The brain goes into a “spasm,” & is pressured into pumping adrenaline.
- Some people are more biologically prone to worry, as they have more sensitive nervous systems and less GABA.
- Rational assurances can’t calm the brain down.
- However, the brain is adaptable, flexible, and re-trainable.

**Strategies to Alleviate Worrying**

- Worrying is a complex habit that can be changed.
- While coping with worry in a different way takes time, repetition, and energy, there are strategies that can help.
- Approaches will differ with each person, depending on the type of worry, the severity, and that person’s own lifestyle, support system, and “feeling habits.”
Breaking the “Worry Chain”

- Worry can feel like a continuing tape loop that takes all of our mental attention.
- Simple interruption techniques can help us “push the reset button,” and restart a healthier pattern.
- Some simple techniques can be to talk to a friend, watch a funny video, or go outdoors.
- We can also develop a silly “reset ritual,” like standing up, turning around 3 times, looking at the ceiling, and smiling.

Focusing on the Feelings

- In worry, the brain is trying to use thinking to solve the problem of feeling.
- Processing our feelings about the event can ease the worry.
- It can also relieve the pressure of multiplying isolated thoughts.
- It starts by naming them and being willing to experience them.
- Often worry is based on fear, hurt, and past negative events.

Focus on the Present Moment

- When it comes to worry, our own heads can be the most dangerous place in which to dwell.
- Bringing our full awareness to the present can allow feelings to pass.
- We can accomplish this through awareness techniques, like focusing on our breathing.
- Or we can “bring ourselves into the room” through being aware of our surroundings and engaging with others around us.
The mental tension of worry triggers physical tension. If we can calm our bodies, it will naturally relax our mind. Some techniques to calm the body include progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, and deep breathing exercises. Other techniques focus on mental calming, like meditation and creative visualization, or utilizing the five senses: vision, hearing, taste, touch and smell.

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Trying to push worries out of our mind usually just makes them more pervasive and intrusive. However, temporarily storing and scheduling time to worry about them can be a very effective approach. This means setting aside 20 minutes a day to “sit down” with worries. As worries come up, we write them down, but wait until the scheduled “worry time” to think about them. We can gain control over worry, which dissipates it’s power.

Every emotion has a chemically-induced life cycle of 90 seconds. If we leave the feeling alone, it will arise, peak, and fade away. It is when we “fuel the worry” with stories, that it re-ignites and builds. Becoming a dispassionate observer of worry, i.e. letting it pass by without fueling it, shortens its duration. One visualization technique is to treat the worry as an uninvited friend who has foibles that we tolerate, but will soon be on their way.
Accepting “the Mess”

- One “worry reliever” is developing a greater tolerance for uncertainty.
- This means that we embrace uncertainty as a normal part of life.
- We accept that we’re always in the middle of about half the stories going on in our lives.
- A similar approach is “clutter therapy.” This is leaving things cluttered, unfinished, and uncategorized.
- This gives us a better tolerance for imperfection.
- This can also be reassuring, when nothing terrible happens.

Utilizing Self-Awareness

- Listening to ourselves think is a powerful tool to minimizing worry.
- This means recognizing when we are stuck in a worrying pattern.
- This also means recognizing and correcting the thinking patterns that generate and sustain worry.
- These include: jumping to conclusions, catastrophizing the incident, all-or-nothing thinking, personalizing, and discounting the positives.
- We can then think the issue through in a more objective way.

Reality Testing

- Worry can often be unrealistic, jumps to the worst case scenarios, and absolutely thrives in the dark.
- Sometimes “fact-finding missions” can help alleviate worry.
- These “answers to our questions” can often calm our fears.
- Typical learner questions can be: “What are the odds of that terrible thing occurring?” or “What are the safeguards?”
- Another reality testing technique is to keep track of our worry predictions and derive a percentage.
Results of Dr. Walter Cavert’s Study on Worry

- 30% of worries are from past situations.
- 40% of worries never occur.
- 12% of worries are from unfounded health concerns.
- 10% of our worries are minor and trivial.
- 8% of our worries are real.

Empowering Ourselves

- Worry can make us feel buffeted by circumstances outside control.
- One antidote is empowerment — feeling reassured that we will be well no matter what happens.
- We can feel empowered by remembering situations in the past where we have persevered.
- Another technique is to use short slogans, called affirmations, like: “I am strong and capable; or “Just take it one day at a time;” or “This isn’t pleasant, but I can handle it.”

Empowering Ourselves

“NEVER LET THE FUTURE DISTURB YOU. YOU WILL MEET IT, IF YOU HAVE TO, WITH THE SAME WEAPONS OF REASON WHICH ARMS YOU AGAINST THE PRESENT.”

— Marcus Aurelius
Utilizing Our Support Systems

- One “fertile soil” for worry is the insecurity from not feeling connected to others.
- One antidote is to develop and maintain “six spheres of connectedness.”
- These include connections to family, friendships, our history, information, organizations & institutions, and spirituality.
- This “strong psychological armor” protects against worry.

Engaging Our Spirituality

- Spirituality can be a very effective tool to ease worry.
- Spirituality is very individual with each person, and can include religion, prayer, spiritual beliefs, and meditation.
- Spirituality can imbue us with faith, peace of mind, gratitude, forgiveness, a deeper purpose to life, a unity with the world, and a connection to a power greater than ourselves.
- It also incorporates healthy practices for body and mind, such as acceptance, altruism, and mindfulness.

Seeking Counseling

- Worry is often fueled by strong “feelings habits” like insecurity, perfectionism, social comparison, pessimism, and a need for control.
- The worry may be a survival mechanism from past trauma, or a component of a mental illness.
- Counseling can help us address underlying reasons for the worry.
- It can also help us discuss and try out strategies for handling worry and connecting with support.
• Worry can start a vicious cycle: we worry about what is going to happen, so we avoid it, which increases the level of worry.
• This can make the situation feel overwhelming and paralyzing.
• Even making just small changes can take the edge off the worry.
• This can include breaking the worry into separate pieces and tackling them one by one.
• One strategy is EPR: evaluate the problem, plan what to do, then remedy the situation, taking on one task at a time.

The Attitude Beatitude

BLESSED IS THE PERSON WHO IS TOO BUSY TO WORRY IN THE DAYTIME, AND TOO SLEEPY TO WORRY AT NIGHT.

Exercise

• Exercise is one of the best ways to reduce anxiousness.
• Exercises reduces tension, drains off frustration, calms our mind, and improves our sleep.
• Regular exercise is helpful for regularly reducing worry.
• We can also apply “on the spot exercise” when we find ourselves trapped in excessive worry.
• Exercise can include physical work, like housecleaning, games and sports activities, weight-bearing exercises, walking, formal classes, and simple workouts at home.
Rewarding Ourselves For All Progress

- Being realistic that real change takes time, and doesn’t go in a straight line
- Therefore, each step, no matter how minor is worthy of self-praise
- It is important to reward ourselves, for example, for only worrying for 2 hours of the day, instead of all day, or worrying, but then being able to re-direct and start the day over.
- We can also reward ourselves for the experience, not the perceived success.

Conclusion

BY CALMING OUR WORRY, WE CAN FOCUS ON BEING OUR BEST SELVES.