

HOW TO STOP WORRYING

by

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You know the feeling - your mind races with thoughts of all the things that can go wrong – what people will think, whether your clothes look good and whether what you have done is good enough. Your heart races and you may feel hot and bothered. Many people spend their time worrying about anything and everything. Fear drains confidence and it's inevitable that life won't always run smoothly. If a loved one needed a medical test you would be concerned about the outcome and yet so much of what we worry about has no basis for concern at all.

Just think of all the things you could be doing with all that time wasted worrying. If you could harness this energy imagine all the things you could be enjoying and just how much more creative you could be! Your brain weighs three pounds and produces enough energy to light a sixty-watt bulb – so use that energy to get more out of life.

According to a report published by National Statistics, an independent research body, one in six adults aged 16 to 74 years have a common

disorder such as anxiety. For those of you who tend to make mountains out of molehills, self-help materials and life coaching are likely to be useful to you – visit www.associationforcoaching.com for further information. However, for those of you whose lives are controlled by extreme fear, it is more likely that you will need to see a Counsellor. Visit www.counselling.co.uk the Website of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy to find out more. In particular, those who suffer from anxiety should benefit from cognitive-behavioural therapy or CBT as it is often called. CBT is a form of therapy recommended by the NHS as the best treatment for anxiety-based conditions, including phobias. Visit www.babcp.com for further information on how CBT can be helpful.

How to Worry Constructively

If you stopped worrying completely you would be of little value to yourself or to anyone else. A certain amount of worry makes you feel better and gets you to check your actions - so keep on worrying.

However, did you know that 39% of the things you worry about never happen, 32% of things you worry about have already happened, 21% of your worries are over trivialities and only 9% of your worries relate to important issues where you have legitimate cause for concern.

If there's a lesson here, it's concentrate on that 9% and put the other 91% behind you. Learn to recognise what is important and what is not

Keep a worry notebook

A worry notebook will help you worry constructively. Take any notebook and divide it into four sections.

1. Things that might happen
2. Things to worry about today that have happened
3. Small things to worry about today
4. Important things to worry about today.

For the next two weeks write down your thoughts for headings 1, 2 and 3 before you go to bed. Choose a time of day when you are at your strongest and brightest to complete section 4. One thing you need to remember about section 4 is that worrying about a problem does not solve it – doing something about it does.

Many people fear making a decision as it might be the wrong decision. What people forget is that making no decision is decision-making by

default. If you take no action *something will still happen!* I was working with a young woman who could not decide whether to apply for a job or not and we agreed that if she kept putting off making a decision she would end up losing the job whether she wanted it or not. You need to decide whether you want to be in control, or if you are going to just let situations happen. There is *always* a choice, even if the choice is between the lesser of two evils.

Relaxation

When you feel anxious, angry, tense or experience any strong emotion it is useful to do some relaxation exercises. There are many forms of relaxation.

The “Rescue Remedy” breathing exercise

So many relaxation exercises rely on you being able to take time out, lie down or, in some way, take you away from what you are doing. This simple breathing exercise is one that you can do anywhere, even while holding a conversation and no one knows you are doing it! It helps to take the edge of your difficult feelings, reduces the negative effects of adrenalin and helps you maintain your calm.

All you need to do is breathe in through your nose for a count of 4 and then breathe out through your mouth for a count of 5 and, as you breathe out, relax your shoulders.

When we are anxious we breathe shallowly. Shallow breathing means your body gets less oxygen and many people are tempted to compensate by breathing faster. You do need to remember that there is no point in trying out this exercise once and then waiting till you need it before using it again as your feelings at the time will get in the way. Practise your breathing exercises throughout the day, get comfortable with them and you will find you incorporate them in your daily life – this is good stress management as much as anything else.

Use your imagination

Some people respond more readily to using their imagination and prefer to use what are called visualisation techniques. A number of studies have shown that visualising situations can lower blood pressure.

This is a good exercise to undertake on your way to or from work. It can take two minutes or half an hour depending on how much time you have

– just remember to get off at your stop!

Imagine you are in a walled garden at the time of the year you like the most – spend some time looking at the flowers, shrubs, trees and so on. You notice an old fashioned wooden door with a wrought iron handle in one of the garden walls and you make your way over and open the door. You then find yourself in your own, very special safe place, a place that no one knows about. It can be anywhere and you can choose to be on your own or have anyone you want with you. Enjoy being there. And then make your way back to the door when you are ready to leave. Shut the door firmly behind you in the knowledge that your special place is always there, whenever you choose to return there. Walk around the garden and, when you are ready, open your eyes.

Anchor yourself

‘Anchoring’ simply means associating positive, calming, confident feelings to an object you carry with you on a daily basis. Many people choose a piece of jewellery they wear regularly. However, if you don’t wear jewellery you could choose a finger or the back of your hand. In moments of strong negative emotions you touch your chosen object focusing on the feelings you have linked to it.

Choose an object and close your eyes and remember an activity, person or a memory that makes you feel happy and relaxed. Rub the ring as you think about your happy thought. Continue to do this for about five minutes. Wait for a few minutes and then repeat the process. Anchoring your positive feelings by merely touching that object should bring about a state of well-being. Like all the other exercises you need to practice so that you condition yourself into a relaxed response.

Use Coping Imagery

Research suggests that when you visualise a positive outcome you are more likely to get one. Coping imagery is used to prepare for difficult situations - for example, if you know you are meeting someone or doing something and just the thought of it makes you feel worried, angry or tense.

All you need to do is to close your eyes and imagine yourself handling the situation. Think about what you would say, what you would do and how you would look and rehearse the types of things you think will happen. What might the other person say and how would you respond? When you do this, you trick the brain into thinking you have dealt

successfully with the situation and you also come up with a series of contingency plans for all the different outcomes you can think of.

Face Your Fear

The truth of the matter is the more you run away from situations the more powerful you make them by making yourself seem unable to deal with what is happening. The more you face the situations that frighten you the less fear you will experience as you teach yourself that there is very little to fear in life apart from fear itself. Break your situation down into stages and tackle each stage independently. For example, you may worry that you will have nothing to say at social events and so you tend to avoid them. However, if you set about thinking of all the social situations you avoid you could then take the least worrying of these and devise yourself an action plan of how you will tackle the situation. Remember – you can do it if you think you can do it and feeling a little uncomfortable while you learn what to do is surely not too high a price to pay for a worry-free life?

You may find it helpful to read *Overcoming Anxiety*, Helen Kennerley, £7.99, Robinson Publications or *No More Anxiety – Learn to be your own Anxiety Coach*, Gladeana McMahon, £8.99, Karnac.

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