



Health & Wellbeing

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How Not to Worry

I guess most of us worry. Some more than others. We may have times in our lives where we worry more than usual. We may worry about our health, our children, our finances, our job, our family, a global pandemic! Worry is a normal and natural response to life's stresses.

Worry is a form of thinking. Our mind becomes focused on a particular problem, concern or challenge. How we worry can either be constructive or destructive. There is '**worth it worry**,' which hopefully leads to you taking some form of action to resolve an issue, or there's '**worthless worry**,' which does nothing to actually deal with the concerns you have. Our thinking (worry) leads us to feel (anxiety) which results in a physical response (stress).

When we worry it's like the engine of our mind is constantly being revved up. All this worry doesn't allow us time to switch off and rest and prevents us from enjoying the journey. This is why mindfulness has become so popular. Mindfulness allows us to practice being in the moment, experiencing and enjoying the "**now**" rather than worrying about what has been or what is to come!



Paul McGee (bestselling author and worldwide speaker) uses the analogy of worry being like an elastic band. *"It was designed to be stretched, but stretch it too far or for too long and it weakens. Likewise we can thrive on pressure. It is good for our own well being to be stretched at times. But stretch us too much for too long and healthy pressure can become unhealthy stress. We can weaken psychologically and emotionally. And if we are not careful, like that elastic band we can end up snapping."*



Worry can become a habit. We can often feel worried and anxious about something and not be aware of the reasons why, but, by bringing to the surface the reasons why we worry we have more chance of dealing with it. There are lots of possible reasons why people worry. Here are some of them:

- 1) We can enjoy worrying - for some people worrying gives them a sense of purpose and drama.
- 2) The challenge of change and uncertainty - the rate of change can be overwhelming in today's society. Sometimes we can be excited by the 'new' but often there is comfort in the status quo.
- 3) A lack of knowledge and experience - sometimes our reasons for worrying are straightforward, we have to do something we haven't done before or face with a challenge we haven't previously encountered.
- 4) A lack of influence or control - We all like to feel like we have a degree of control of a situation. The less control we have to more likely it is for us to worry.
- 5) Your values - worry can be linked to your attitude to life (what other people think of them is not important, being late is just a fact of life etc...) Some people worry more than others is linked to what is important to people.
- 6) Your upbringing - children take cues from their parents. We are role models for our kids whether we like it or not. No one will ever be perfect, but we need to learn ways to manage our own stresses as it is not only good for you but good for those around you too.
- 7) Previous experiences - your past can have a profound impact on your present.
- 8) Over exposure to bad news - worry and anxiety can spread like a virus and the media is the biggest contributor to the spread of bad news - this has been particularly true this past year.

With all these reasons for us to worry it is no wonder that in society more people are experiencing worry (thinking) that leads to anxiety (feeling) that results in stress (action). **BUT what can we do about it?**

Ready, Set, Go!

REMEMBER - some worries are entirely legitimate and often helpful.

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How do we worry less and recognise when our worry to worthwhile or worthless?



10 Tips for managing our worry

1. Challenge your thinking and your mental diet

How often do your dire predictions come true? When we do this we become our own internal coach, we engage our rational brain which allows us to to have more insight into the situation and realise that often feelings are not facts. What we put inside our bodies can potentially make us sick or better. The same goes for what we allow into our brain. It can be healthy and uplifting or not.

2. Increase your circle of influence

People spend vast amounts of their time worrying about things they have no control over. Think about the following categories and explore which you have a level of influence over : health, finances, maintaining relationships, work issues, the weather, the future of the economy etc.. There will be some that we have no significant influence over but others we do have influence. That influence allows us to take some level of control. This is a helpful statement to remember: "I focus on what I can influence and let go of the rest."

3. Manage your imagination

How you use your imagination can seriously affect your anxiety levels. We create a 'mental movie' when we worry about a forthcoming event. Imagining a series of negative events would definitely have influence how you are feeling. Fearful feelings could be a motivator. You have to decide whether the mental images derail you or drive you.

4. Show a little respect to yourself

How we think about our circumstances and our ability to deal with them is crucial to how we are feeling. Our thoughts count. Remember we are the director of our movie and we have some control over our script. It may not always turn out a 'happy ending' but your influence may help it be a happier one. Positive self-talk helps us to alter the script.

6. Don't go it alone

Depriving yourself of support is like depriving yourself of oxygen.

7. Let go of grudges

Residual stress is something where the event is over but we fail to move on. We re-live and re-tell or we store away our pain. Resentment does not harm the other person, it simply eats away at you.

8. Engage in exercise

Psychologists have found that one of the most productive techniques for encouraging a more positive outlook in life is exercise. It improves mental functioning, can calm you down, has an impact on our self-mastery, self-discipline and self-esteem.

9. Cut the clutter

A horse needs to be cleaned out daily for it to thrive in its environment. When there is too much clutter in our lives we lack clarity in our thinking.

10. Find the funny

Scientists have established that exposure to humour improves immune system functioning. Finding the funny might not seem the most natural response to combat worry and stress, but making your environment friendlier in this way can be another way to feed the soul.

(Ideas taken from 'How Not to Worry' by Paul McGee)

Tips to help our children who struggle with worry

There are loads of great books and resources to help children who worry. Here are just some suggestions:



“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of it’s joy.”
Leo Buscaglia