

WELLNESS TIPS

MANAGING EXCESSIVE WORRYING – Part 1

Worry is a normal part of life, something we all experience to some extent and you may have found yourself worrying more over the past several months.

Worrying can be beneficial. It serves as an alert to a potential threat and can be a motivator to take action to address or avoid potential negative situations.

Worrying is a type of thinking that focuses on the future, with thoughts of “what if . . .?” and what might go wrong, generating anxiety and fear. Some people believe that if they don’t worry, bad things will happen; that worrying helps prepare one for the worst; or prevents the problem. This doesn’t work.

When worry is excessive, persistent, and uncontrollable it interferes with daily life and being able to problem-solve effectively. It can also contribute to poor sleep, decreased concentration and productivity, depression, and other physical and mental health problems, as well as interfere with relationships. Chronic worry may be a symptom of an anxiety disorder.

This is the first of two Wellness Tips focused on more effectively managing worrying. Part 2 will be coming next week.

STRATEGIES FOR MORE EFFECTIVELY MANAGING WORRYING

1. Consider what you are worrying about. Is it a problem that exists or is it unproductive repetitive “what if . . .”? thinking. If you can change it to “How can I . . .?”, it will help you identify what can you do now to address the problem.
2. Is the target of your worry something that you can have control over? If so, begin to identify possible solutions and develop an action plan.
3. Is the focus of your worry something that you can’t control or don’t have evidence will occur? Worrying about the future doesn’t result in a more predictable outcome. The future is still uncertain. Uncertainty is neutral; it also allows for the possibility that unexpected positive events may also occur. Ask yourself how likely the predicted event is to occur. Work on accepting that associated discomfort is tolerable.
4. Avoid procrastinating, which extends the worrying.

5. Set aside time each day (preferably the same time) as a time when you allow yourself to focus on your worries. As worries occur throughout the day, write them down on a list and set it aside until the designated time. Review your list at that time and see if your perspective has changed or if you can identify a plan for addressing. This strategy can help reduce worry.
6. Talk about your concerns with someone. This will help you sort out your thinking and assumptions as someone responds with their perspective. Avoid talking with someone who may exacerbate your anxiety.
7. Keep a notepad and pen at your bedside. If worrying is disrupting your sleep, write down the worry or what you need to do the next day to let it go.
8. Change how you respond to your worry. Instead of thinking “stop worrying”, shift your attention to labelling the thought as “it’s a worry” or it’s “just worrying”. This pulls you out of your worried thoughts and you then redirect your thinking to the present and what you are doing. Don’t be judgmental – just notice, label and redirect.

These strategies take practice but can be very helpful. If worrying is too distressing or disruptive, consider talking with an MSCC counselor or your health care provider.

Verywellmind. “How to Stop Your Constant Worrying.” Katharina Star. June, 2019.

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HelpGuide. “How to Stop Worrying.” Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, & Jeanne Segal. October 2019.

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WebMD. “9 Steps to End Chronic Worrying.” Denise Mann. January, 2008.

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Psychology Today. “10 Tips to Manage Your Worrying.” Graham C.L. Davey. June 25, 2012.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/why-we-worry/201206/10-tips-manage-your-worrying>

If you would like to review previous Wellness Wednesday Tips, go to the CCOM Medical Student Counseling Center Website: <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Stay safe and stay healthy!

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