

TIP SHEET

Worry never
robs tomorrow
of its sorrow,
it only saps
today of its joy
- Leo F. Buscaglia

Worry & Negative Thoughts



What is Worry?

Worry is the state of experiencing negative thoughts over real or imagined things. They can be worries about either past, present or future issues and generally provoke anxiety, stress, and concern.

When is it a problem?

It is normal to experience a certain amount of worry about situations. Anxiety can often act as a natural alarm system for threats and motivate people to take action and problem solve in their lives.

However, worry can be considered a problem when it is difficult to control and when worries continue to grow. Worry is a problem when it leads to distress and disrupts normal functioning, such as attending work, school, or social activities.

In your day to day life, do you recognise any of the following?:

- *Feelings:* Do you find that you have been worrying excessively almost every day for at least six months? Do you find yourself overwhelmed by your worries and that they are uncontrollable? Do you worry about a wide range of things and tend to expect the worst outcome? Do you find that your worries are stressful and interfere with your daily life?
- *Physical effects:* Do you often feel a sense of restlessness or irritability? Do you have problems with falling and staying asleep? Do you find that worry has a physical impact on your body, for example by causing muscle tension, body aches, or nausea? Do you have a feeling like you are constantly "on edge"?
- *Behaviours:* Do you find yourself avoiding situations that could be potentially anxiety provoking? Do you have difficulty concentrating or focusing on one thing? Are you constantly putting tasks off because you feel overwhelmed by worry? Do you find it difficult to relax and wind down?

How to manage worry more effectively? Here are some ACTIONS:

Educate yourself about productive vs. unproductive worry

Humans have a fight or flight response for a reason, we experience worry when we are in threatening situations so that it provokes a problem solving reaction from us and keeps us safe. Worry is productive when it helps keep us from harm and forces us to face any issues in our lives. However, worry becomes unproductive when it is continues and is excessive whether or not there is a threat. In this situation worry is not rational and adaptive for us; it can be overwhelming and interrupt your everyday function. Understanding the difference between productive and unproductive worry is the first step towards better managing your worries.



Calm yourself using relaxation techniques

There are a range of different techniques that can be practiced to help calm you when you are experiencing worries. Some people find that different things work better for them, so it is worth trying a few. One of the most common relaxation techniques is simply deep breathing exercises. There is also benefit to be found in meditation which can be guided through a CD or self-practiced. Another option is to practice Mindfulness, which is done by focusing on the sensations of the present moment to distract yourself from worrying thoughts. Some people also benefit from listening to calming music, going for a walk, or doing something creative such as painting.



Change your lifestyle

It may not like something that can help you effectively manage your worries; however making a few changes to your lifestyle promotes positive changes in your mental well-being. One of the places to start is with your diet to make sure your nutrition is making your mind and body feel good. Another great idea is to get into a regular exercise routine, even if it is just walking or riding a bike. The final part of your lifestyle to consider is your sleep habits, whether you are getting enough and if it is of good quality. A lot of people with excessive worries find their sleep becomes affected, so it is important to follow good sleep hygiene and see a doctor if things don't improve.



Talk to others

ADAVIC can refer you to therapists who specialise in working with anxiety. You may also want to share your experiences and seek support from fellow 'worriers' – we can link you to peer support groups and online forums.



Challenge your thoughts!

Many people who worry a lot tend to get into bad thinking habits where they overestimate the possibility that things will go badly and consider every negative thought as true. These bad thinking habits are called cognitive distortions. It can be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

What is the evidence that this thought is true?

What is the evidence that this thought is not true?

Are there other ways that are more positive and realistic that I could look at the situation?

What is the probability that the thing I am worried will happen will actually happen?

If the probability is low, what is a more likely and realistic outcome of the situation?

What is the worst thing that could happen and what could you do to handle it?

What would you say to a friend who had this same worry?

Is this thought helpful? Will worrying about it help me in any way?

ONLINE RESOURCES

- E-couch – a free self-help interactive online program for generalized anxiety and worry <http://ecouch.anu.edu.au>
- Smiling Mind – a free app and website which guides you through Mindfulness programs <http://smilingmind.com.au>

BOOKS

- Overcoming Worry: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques (Meares & Freeston)
- Quiet Your Mind: An Easy-to-Use Guide to Ending Chronic Worry and Negative Thoughts and Living a Calmer Life (Selby)
- The Worry Trap: How to Free Yourself from Worry & Anxiety using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (LeJeune)

For more tips and resources see <https://www.adavic.org.au/PG-fact-sheets-generalised-anxiety-disorder.aspx>

