

How to stop worrying

This article contains many practical tips to stop your mind from being in a worry spin and to help you relax, but first it helps to understand what is happening.

Constant worrying causes stress, whether consciously or unconsciously (ie you don't realize are doing it). When you worry your body reacts to the danger you are thinking of, and its natural response is to go into 'fight or flight' mode until the danger is gone (you stop worrying). When you are like this your mind and body are geared up for escape or for confrontation, and you can do little else until you stop worrying. This is why you can find it difficult to think of anything else, or sleep.

Everybody worries to some degree, the problem is when you get stuck in a worrying spin and can't get out. This becomes stress. Paradoxically it also means you are in a poor state to deal with whatever you are worrying about as your priority is only fight or flight. Relaxing ends the fight or flight urgency, and therefore opens up the mind to other options.

Constant worrying about something that may happen is usually more about you worrying that you will not be able to cope with what happens, rather than what actually may happen. Make a decision to learn how to cope, or work on trusting yourself to be able to cope. More often than not you will have coped with events that you couldn't foresee and worry about, in fact you will probably have coped with them better because you didn't worry! Athletes and other performers know that to do their best they need to focus on doing their best rather than what may go wrong, a bit like focusing on where you are going rather than where not to go. The bottom line is - if you are worrying you are not happy and relaxed, and I'm sure you would rather be happy and relaxed, so it makes sense to learn how to control your worrying. Your thoughts keep worry alive, so by having more control over your thoughts you can have more control over your worry. 95% of what we worry about will not happen anyway so by choosing to worry we are making a choice to be unhappy right now for something that only has a 5% chance of happening in the future. And if it does happen, worrying about it will not have made any difference. Sure think of all the 'what ifs' and make a plan, then let it go. If you are stressed when it happens you are likely to forget your plans anyway. I know this is easier to agree with than put into action, but practice will make it easier to do. Humans are creatures of habit and you will have a pattern of worry, once you break that pattern the spin will stop (unless you start it again). Replace it with a pattern of relaxation instead.

Ways to get out of a worry spin:

- Make a conscious decision to distract yourself, and do it until you forget your worry. Find what works best for you – something that you enjoy and get lost in is easiest, eg a book, TV show, music, crossword, reciting something aloud, focused daydream etc.. You can only think of one thing at once so by forcing yourself to think of something else the worry will lose it's grip. Find something that you love doing, maybe a long term project. It is also impossible to be having fun and worry at the same time.
- Write it down. Writing gets it out of your head so you can take control of what you are telling yourself and challenge it. It also helps you to get specific about the worry, how likely it is and what you can do. Once you have a plan, or have worked out all possible scenarios, then if it pops up again you can read what you have decided.
- Look for what you can learn from the worry. What would you need to know for it not to be a worry? Do you trust yourself to cope if it does? What belief keeps the worry alive? (eg. I have to make the right decision, it's my fault if goes wrong, others will think I am bad if...) Beliefs are not fact, they are what we have learnt makes sense, eg. if I behave a certain way I will be liked. Some beliefs are created to protect us in certain situations, but then hinder us later in life. They can be changed – sometimes simply by challenging them but may need some deeper healing doing first. Identifying the real reason you are worrying (eg. to be liked) can help you focus on solving that rather than what you are pretending it is.
- Daydream/ visualize/ remember a time you felt relaxed, safe and worry-free. Make the picture life-size, colour and with you in it, hear what sounds were there and notice where the feeling is. Alternatively fantasize about something amazing happening.
- Change what words you use (see sheet on distorted thinking), especially using should and ought. Use could instead, it lessens the pressure we put on ourselves.
- Have a worry hour. During the day write down any worries that you can save until that time.
- Take 10 deep breaths, concentrating on each. Even if your mind wanders continue.

- Do relaxation techniques. If you relax your body it has an affect on your mind, and also lessens the damage done by being continually on alert.
- Find what works for you – rescue remedy, aromatherapy, relaxation tape, hot bath, exercise, have a massage, or all at once. (every little helps)
- Repeat a positive statement. Not only will this occupy your thoughts, it will relax your body. Find a quote that makes you smile, or feel safe. In this moment everything is fine.
- Write a list of things that you are grateful for, no matter how small. Your health, food, friends, home, sunshine, comfort etc. – be specific. Reminding yourself what is good in your life can reassure you that things are not so bad.
- Spend time helping people less fortunate than you. Some people worry about if they will eat today – how does that compare with your worry?
- Get out in nature. Studies have shown that nature has a relaxing affect, and it could be that your worry is picked up from other people.
- Laugh. Either find something that makes you laugh, or exaggerate your worry and imagine telling it at a comedy festival.
- Imagine the voice talking about your worry sounds like Donald Duck (this does work, really!)
- Scream, or jump up and down. This releases energy, and you will naturally take a deep breath afterwards.
- Think of as many alternative outcomes to your worry as you can, including positive ones, and rate them for likelihood.
- Phone someone and talk it through.
- Work out if it is worry you are feeling, sometimes we mislabel our feelings and look for something to pin it on. Excitement is similar and easily turned in worry by thoughts. Similarly it may be someone else's worry we have picked up, see if it goes after relaxing.
- Reward yourself for breaking the pattern, have a penalty for indulging.
- Fast forward to a years time – will you want to have made yourself feel bad by worrying, or wish you had used that time to achieve something else?

- Meditate. This requires regular practice but will strengthen the control muscle in your mind.
- Be kind to yourself. Worrying about the fact you worry will only make it worse. You are doing the best you can until you learn how to do better.
- Remember F E A R spells false expectations made real. You are basing your worry on false assumptions.

You may want to try all of the above to find out what works best for you.

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My name is Kathryn Hodgson and I am trained in NLP Psychotherapy and Evolutional Kinesiology (amongst many other things!). If you want to learn more about how I can help you, or read any of my other free articles please visit my website at www.katalyst4change.co.uk

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