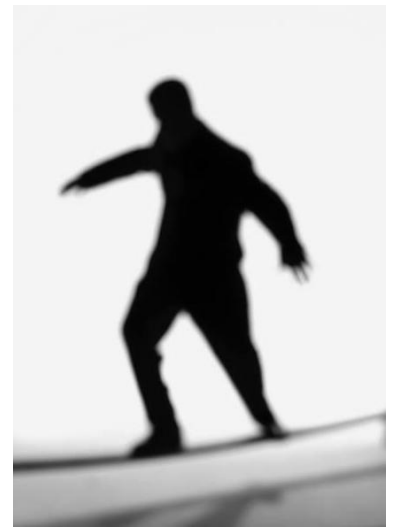


"But what if I'm THE ONE?" How Intolerance of Uncertainty Makes you Anxious

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Someone says to you, "But the chances of your getting killed in an airplane crash are millions to one? What are you worried about?" And you reply, "But what if I'm the one?" Or you go to your doctor and she says, "It looks like you don't have cancer". You go home and you think, "Can she be absolutely sure?" And then you get a second and third opinion. You can't tolerate not knowing for sure.



Researchers Michel Dugas and Robert Ladouceur have found that a core feature of worry is the inability to tolerate uncertainty. In fact, some worriers say that they would rather know for sure that the outcome will be bad than left in suspense not knowing for sure. In fact, you may worry in order to "gain certainty". You look for all kinds of information and possible solutions to every problem you come up with—and then you ask yourself, "Will this solution tell me the answer?" But the only answer that you will accept is absolute certainty. So you reject almost all the answers because they are not perfect and they can't tell you for sure.



Are you intolerant of uncertainty? Do you reject the evidence that the chances are very, very low? Do you continually demand perfect solutions that will have to work for sure? Do you seek out reassurance and , then, say, "Well, you can't tell me for sure"? Do you think that if you simply think about a problem--- "It's possible I could have cancer"—that this means that you absolutely must find

out for sure that you don't?

Chronic worriers often equate uncertainty with a bad outcome. They think that if they don't know for sure that they would be irresponsible allowing this uncertainty to persist.

What can you do?

First, ask yourself what the advantages would be in accepting some reasonable uncertainty. Would you be less [anxious](#), less worried, and more able to enjoy the present moment?

Second, what are the disadvantages in accepting uncertainty? Does it mean that you are now irresponsible, in danger, letting your guard down? Are these really rational evaluations? Or are you exaggerating?

Third, what uncertainty do you already accept? For example, when you drive, take a plane, eat in a restaurant, interact with someone new, go to a new city, start a new project at work---aren't you already accepting uncertainty?

Fourth, do you know anyone who has absolute certainty? Anyone? How do they live with themselves? Are they irresponsible or in danger?

Fifth, your thought, "I could always be the one", is something you fear. Try repeating this thought for thirty minutes every day---as slowly as you can. As you repeat the thought, imagine yourself standing back and observing the words floating by on a stream. Stay with the words. Do this very very slowly. Imagine yourself as a zombie repeating the feared thought. Do you notice that your anxiety goes up and then eventually goes down? Are you becoming less afraid of the thought?



Sixth, what is the advantage of uncertainty? Does uncertainty create novelty, pleasant surprises, new and exciting challenges? How would your life be a dreadful bore if you had absolute certainty?

Seventh, rather than thinking of uncertainty, think about how you can actually solve real problems that really exist. People who fear uncertainty underestimate their ability to solve real problems in the real world. What are some real problems that you have solved? Have some of these problems been events that you didn't anticipate? Perhaps you are good at solving problems—if they really exist.

Eighth, practice mindful breathing. Spend twenty minutes each day, mindfully watching your breath as you sit in a quiet room. Don't try to control your breathing, watch to see if your mind wanders. Stay in the moment with your breath. If you stay in the current moment, your worries will temporarily disappear.

For more information on handling your worries, see: [The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You](#)

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Links:

[1] http://www.amazon.com/Worry-Cure-Seven-Steps-Stopping/dp/1400097665/sr=8-2/qid=1168229522/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2/102-9636244-5523303?ie=UTF8&s=books

[2] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/anxiety-files>