

First Week: Ending Your Worries

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We are now in our first week in learning how to handle our worries. It's going to require time, effort, and the ability to tolerate frustration, uncertainty, imperfection and discomfort. Are you willing to do something to help yourself?

Then, read on.

If you followed my suggestion in the [previous blog](#) you have:

1. Listed your specific worries
2. Identified what triggers your worry
3. Examined how your worry is related to your feelings and sensations
4. Identified specific topics

Now what?

1. Same worries over and over

Repetition
Repetition
Repetition

Well, let's take the first three suggestions above---listing your specific worries, seeing what triggers your worry, and examining how your worry is related to your emotions and sensations. As you have been writing them down, does it occur to you that you are repeating a lot of the same worries every day and every week?

- I will make a fool of myself
- I will make a fool of myself

- I will make a fool of myself
- I will make a fool of myself

Are you worried about the same things-that don't come true---over and over again? Since I have identified worry as recurring negative predictions, I want you to think about why you need to remind yourself hundreds of times about the same thing. Why nag yourself about the same exact worry? It is the recurrence of worry, the repetitive, spinning your wheels quality of worry that causes the problem. Your mind is stuck in a rut.

This is important for us in our self-help program. One reason that you repeat yourself is that you don't want to overlook anything. It's like reminding yourself to check something. Ironically, recent research actually shows that checking leads to the belief that you cannot trust your memory. The more you check, the less accurate you think your memory is. But you are checking because you don't trust your memory. You are locked in a vicious cycle.



Once you see that you are repeating the same five or ten worries, then you can simply list them and then check them off. (No pun intended.) You don't have to repeat them over and over again. Just say, "OK, I see it's that one again." Also, by writing them down you will find that your memory is better than you thought. These are the same worries.

Write down your most common worries below:

My Ten Most Common Worries

1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.

2. Set aside worry time



As you have been writing down your worries you may think, "I am worried all the time" and "I can't get away from my worries-they just happen to me". Because your worries pervade your day, everything is associated with your worry. Your bed, your desk, the car, your living room, walking down the street---everything and every time is associated with worry.

A powerful technique to counter this is to set aside a specific time and place to do your worrying. Don't choose a time three hours or less before bedtime. Choose a time in the late morning or afternoon. Sit down and write out your worries for thirty minutes. Just write out whatever negative thoughts come to your mind. You will probably notice that you are repeating the same worries. You may even find that it's hard to fill up the thirty minutes. You may get bored. That's OK. In fact, that's progress. Boredom is progress. It's better than feeling [anxious](#).

Save your list.

"But what if I have a worry before or after worry time?" That's the point of this exercise. Write out the worry on a piece of paper (or your computer), save it, and then focus on it during the worry time later. Put off actually worrying about the worry until the worry time.

You might think that this is impossible. But a lot of people find that

- They can delay worry until later
- When they sit down later it no longer seems important
- They feel more in control
- Other times and situations are no longer associated with worry

You may find that you can put off the repetitive nagging sense of your worry-and get on with other things in your life. Some people like to say, "I'll put that off until worry time" or "I'll make an appointment for that worry for later". When "later" comes, you aren't concerned.

In the table below, write out your typical worries during your worry time. Keep track of what time you do the worry time and where you are. Don't do worry time while [lying](#) in bed.

Using My Worry Time

Time and Place Typical Worries

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages to worrying about this?

Even though you may say, "I don't get anything out of worrying-it's driving me nuts!"--- there probably is some hidden motivation behind your worrying. People who worry often believe that their worry will motivate them, help them catch a problem before it gets out of hand, keep them from being surprised-or that their worry is a sign of their responsibility. What advantages do you hope to gain?



Now, ask yourself, what are the disadvantages? If you have been doing your homework, you can see that you are tense, your body is aching from all of the anxiety, you can't sleep, you feel [depressed](#), and it makes you feel discouraged about the future. You are also annoying other people with your constant demands for reassurance. Are there any other disadvantages?

How would you be better off if you worried 75% less?

Write out the advantages and the disadvantages of worrying about these things.

Advantages to Worrying

Disadvantages to Worrying

4. Is this productive worry?



One distinction I make in my book [The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You](#) is that some worry can be productive.

Productive worry is a concern or negative prediction that you can do something about in the next twenty-four hours---preferably NOW.

Productive worry leads to a TO-DO list---some action that you can take that plausibly can solve your problem. For example, let's say you are worried about whether you will be able to get a flight from NYC to Florida in December. You can actually do something concrete about this now. You can go onto the internet, book your tickets and set aside your worry. Or, say you are worried about your taxes being late. You can get out the information and start working on your taxes. You can make progress now. I call it YOUR TO-DO LIST TODAY.

But let's say you are worried that it will rain for the four days that you are in Florida. What can you do about that now? Nothing. Unproductive worry is filled with what-ifs that you can't do anything about. Worrying about this is unproductive because you can't take any action now. Or what if you are worried that you will be audited by the IRS? You can't control what the IRS is going to do-- you can only control what you do. So, that is an unproductive worry.

To learn more about productive and unproductive worry [see my blog](#) on this.

Is this worry productive or unproductive?

Example of my worry: _____

How is it Productive?

How is it Unproductive?

Summarizing so far:

So the next four techniques for you are

1. Identifying the same worries---over and over
2. Setting aside worry time

3. Listing the advantages and disadvantages of worrying
4. Asking if this is a productive or unproductive worry

Use these techniques on a daily basis. You will still have worries, but you may find yourself a little more in control and a little less bothered. One week at a time....

In our next blog we will look at the need to accept uncertainty and limitation.

See [THE WORRY CURE](#) for more ideas on how to handle your worry. My new book, [Anxiety Free: Unravel Your Fears Before They Unravel You](#), will be published in April 2009.

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/anxiety-free/200808/eight-weeks-end-your-worries>
- [2] http://www.amazon.com/Worry-Cure-Seven-Steps-Stopping/dp/1400097665/sr=8-1/qid=1170179793/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/104-8070893-9749523?ie=UTF8&s=books
- [3] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/anxiety-free/200805/what-is-productive-worry>
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