



Worrying Well

Learn to worry well and benefit from stress

As we all know, worrying creates stress, and stress is a health risk. Worrying can raise your blood pressure, cause you to suffer sleepless nights and affect your digestion, your immunity – even your sex life. But worrying isn't all bad – the ability to worry about possible dangers and prepare for them has been a crucial factor in the development and survival of Mankind. Here's how to tap into your evolutionary birthright and make stress work for you!

1. Turn stress into your friend – understand when to worry.

Thousands of years ago worrying ensured our survival. Humans were the feeblest, slowest, most poorly protected food around. 'Man the hunter' is a hopelessly inaccurate idea, as for most of our evolution we survived by spotting dangerous situations and staying well away!

And how did we do that? By worrying! Or put another way; using our thinking ability to explore every possibility before putting ourselves at risk. Possibilities like "There could be a tiger in there", had to be checked out first! These days few situations threaten our physical survival, but we still behave as if there are many. Most of us face many potentially worry-provoking situations every day and if we avoided them all, we'd get nowhere fast.

2. Make worrying constructive – learn how to 'worry well'.

Take time to think over all your worries, dilemmas and problems. Set aside half an hour for worrying during the day. When you find yourself worrying at any other time, note the worry down and keep it for later. Once you write down your worries, you can be more objective, and 'leave them alone' for a while.

Try using the following template:

1. "I am worried about..."
2. "The worst that could happen is..."
3. "The best that could happen is..."
4. "Things I can do now are..."
5. "Other factors to remember".

Also realise that tiredness, hunger, anxiety and other 'low' mood states can lead to your thoughts becoming more doom-laden. So worry after you've eaten, in the morning after a good sleep, or best of all, after 20 minutes exercise.

3. Take the pressure off yourself – delay making crucial decisions.

You may find it hard to think of anything else when you are caught up worrying about some future decision. Realise that sometimes you can choose not to make a decision for the time being. Say to yourself "I'm not ready to make a decision on that yet. I'll think about it again in 5 days time", and put the date in your diary.

Getting yourself too worked up with worry can have a detrimental effect on your mood, sleep patterns, memory and problem-solving ability. Dwelling on a problem can make it harder to find a solution. By giving yourself 'time off' from thinking about it - you'll find you get a greater perspective and find solutions easier. Writing down your worries and putting them aside until you decide to deal with them, allows you to put them to rest for the time being.

4. Worry your way to a solution, not more problems!

Chronic worrying can quickly make you feel helpless, as you imagine more and more problems until you reach the point where you can't possibly solve them all. It usually goes a bit like "If that happens, then this will happen, and then that will be a disaster!"

Instead, try challenging worry-provoking thoughts with questions like "What evidence is there for that?" and "Just how likely is that, based on my past experience?" Learn to distinguish between possibility and probability. It's *your* mind – take control of *your* thoughts!

Worrying is about balancing the odds of whether or not to do something. If you have to do it, then what you need is preparation, not worry. For example, with public speaking, prepare intellectually by learning your material, and emotionally by doing relaxation and visualisation, or self hypnosis

The Bottomline:

Whether making a business decision, thinking about the kids or fretting over a relationship, worrying *is* useful, but only when it's done well. Worrying well saves time, energy, and emotional discomfort and enables you to make better decisions. So, to avoid excessive and ineffective worry, you can employ the techniques above and learn to better tolerate uncertainty.