

TriHealth EAP

Coping with Worry: Eight Strategies

Worry, a pattern of dwelling on potential difficulties, is a normal part of the human experience. In fact, productive worry can help us prepare and find solutions for new or difficult situations. However, unproductive worry can keep us in a constant state of agitation and affect our daily lives. While it often can feel overwhelming, there are simple techniques that can reduce the severity and impact of worry on our lives.



1. Self-Awareness: Listening to ourselves think can be a powerful tool to help minimize worry. We can take a “time out” to recognize when we are stuck in a pattern of worry, and then correct the thinking patterns that generate it. For example, we can “catch ourselves” jumping to conclusions, anticipating the worst scenario, discounting the positives, personalizing, or having an “all-or-nothing” pattern of thinking. We then can challenge ourselves to think of the situation in a more productive and creative way.



2. Interruption: Worry can feel like a continuous tape loop that steals our emotional attention. Interruption techniques can help us “push the reset button” and start over with a healthier pattern. Simple techniques can be to go outdoors, call a friend, or watch a funny video. We also can develop our own silly “re-set ritual” like standing up, turning around three times, looking at the ceiling and smiling. In time, the skill of starting over gets built into the ritual, and automatically helps us escape the pattern of worry.



3. Designated “Worry Time:” Trying to push worries out of our mind usually make them more intrusive; however, temporarily storing and setting a time to worry about them can be effective in minimizing their impact. Schedule a 20-30 minute block per day as a routine time to worry. As worries arise, we write them down, assuring ourselves that we won’t forget them and waiting until the “official worry time” to give them our attention. This often helps us gain control over our worry, which takes away its power.



4. Personal Empowerment: Worry can make us feel battered by circumstances beyond our control. One antidote is empowerment – feeling reassured we are going to be well no matter what happens to us. We can get in touch with our own empowerment by remembering situations in the past in which we have persevered. Another technique is to generate positive slogans called affirmations, and repeat them to ourselves on a daily basis. Examples of effective affirmations are: “I am strong and capable,” “Take it one day at a time,” or “I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.”



5. Support System: One “fertile soil” for worry is the insecurity of feeling adrift from others. One solution is to maintain a strong connection to our own support system. This can include family, friends, social organizations, our community, coworkers, and our spirituality. As we communicate and receive friendship, love and support from others, we feel reassured and protected from our worries. Tools to develop a strong support system include reaching out to friends, joining social activities, and staying in touch with our extended family members.



6. Spirituality: Spirituality can have a powerful impact on calming worry. How each of us practices our spirituality is very personal. It can vary from engaging in a formal religion, to praying, to meditating, to reading daily reflections. Spirituality can fill us with faith, peace of mind, gratitude, a deeper purpose in life and a connection with a power greater than ourselves, all of which can heal the habit of worry. Spirituality also incorporates healthy emotional practices, such as acceptance, selflessness, forgiveness, and mindfulness.



7. Exercise: Exercise is one of the best tools we have to reduce anxiety. Regular exercise reduces tension, drains excess energy, triggers endorphins, calms our minds, and improves our sleep. We also can apply “on-the-spot” exercise when we find ourselves trapped in excessive worry. Exercise can include games and sports such as volleyball or bowling; weight-bearing exercises like walking or running; chores, including housecleaning or yard work; flexibility exercises like stretching; or strength-building exercises like weight lifting.



8. Counseling: Worry often is fueled by strong “feelings habits” such as insecurity, perfectionism, social comparison, pessimism, and a need for control. The worry may be a survival mechanism from past trauma or a component of a mental illness. Counseling can be a safe place to share worries and can help address underlying reasons behind the worry. It also can provide a place to discuss and practice strategies for managing worry and connecting with support.



If you find chronic worry is affecting your quality of life, contact TriHealth EAP for confidential counseling and assistance.

Call TriHealth EAP at **513 891 1627 | 800 642 9794**
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