

Worry Time

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Daily Worry Time is a paradoxical way to reduce worry. Instead of resisting your anxiety, you will choose periods during the day that you purposely devote to worrying. See how peculiar that sounds, to instruct you to actually worry more! That's how you can recognize a paradoxical technique; it sounds wrong!

Set aside, twice a day, about ten minutes that you have designated solely to worry about your problem. Perhaps take the first Worry Time in the morning before you go to work. Sit down in a private place and pay attention to your worries. (I'll describe how to do that in a minute.) Then, at the end of the day, perhaps right after you get off work, sit down again and designate this as your second Worry Time.

When you sit down for this special time, totally devoted to your worries, follow these guidelines. Spend the entire time thinking only of your worries about this topic. Think of nothing positive. Do not try to convince yourself that these worries are unnecessary, do not try to see the positive side or argue in any way whatsoever. Only introduce negative thoughts, and let those continue to come up. More and more of them! As many as you have about the topic! Every angle and aspect of your worries and fears! Just let them come up in your mind, and continue to look for more of them. And try to become as uncomfortable as possible as you review these thoughts.

If, after a while, you run out of worries, recycle the worries you have already stated. Go back to the first ones and repeat them. Your goal is to spend the entire ten minutes focused on your worries, even if you have to repeat them. It is not going to work if you say, "Well, five or six minutes have gone by, and I can't really think of anything else to worry about, so I think I'll stop here today."

No! Don't do that, because there is method to the madness here. I want you to experience, eventually, the kind of frustration that comes with not being able to generate any more new thoughts. People who worry feel as if they worry all day long, but that is not actually what happens. Their worries come in little spurts - they argue themselves out of the worries, they reassure themselves that things

Create a Worry Time

1. Set aside two daily Worry Times of 10 minutes each.
2. Spend this entire time thinking only about your worries regarding one issue. (OPTIONS: speak into a tape recorder or talk to a "coach")
3. Do not think about any positive alternatives, only the negative ones. And do not convince yourself that your worries are irrational.
4. Attempt to become as anxious as possible while worrying.
5. Continue to the end of each worry period, even if you run out of ideas and have to repeat the same worries over again.
6. At the end of ten minutes, let go of those worries with some calming breaths, then return to other activities.

will be okay, or they tell themselves to shut up, or they get distracted -- and then the worries become quiet. But a little later the worries come back, and this battle begins again.

In Worry Time you don't fight or struggle with your thoughts. You clear away your slate, set aside other thoughts, and give total and full attention to your worries. The result is that your worries diminish.

Why does it work? Because it helps you begin to shift your emotions when you think of the problem. During your first few Worry Times, you will probably become upset with your thoughts. After all, you are dwelling on your worst fears, and you are going over them repeatedly (like you usually do in the back of your mind at other times). But what happens when you review the same material in detail twice a day for days? After several days, most people complain about how hard it is to fill the ten minutes. They run out of things to say. Instead of feeling anxious, they get bored. Now wouldn't that be a pleasant change!

That is one of our primary goals. Instead of thinking about a worry and instantly feeling anxious, you begin to have other emotional responses. Your body's emergency system stops kicking in reflexively. If your worry is about airline travel, after a few days you might even catch yourself feeling good about getting to your destination more comfortably (and three days sooner than you would if you took the train).

To make those changes in your emotions you need to follow the guidelines of Worry Time carefully. For instance, don't spend any time during this ten minutes trying to convince yourself that your worries are irrational. Do just the opposite: go ahead and let yourself get worked up. Conjure up all the negative, uncomfortable and distressful feelings that coincide with these thoughts. At the end of ten minutes, you can let go of your worries and begin to relax. Take a couple of Calming Breaths, shake off those tensions and go about your day.

Don't use Worry Time just once or twice. Ideally, you should place it in your schedule for at least ten days in a row. (This means if you are concerned about an upcoming event, make sure you start to worry early enough!) Expect that after several days Worry Time won't be able to stir up such strong emotions inside you. Don't stop then! Keep up the practice, because that's the kind of change we're looking for. Part of this design is for you to practice even when, try as you might, you can't get emotionally aroused.

There are three ways you can repeat your worries during this time. The first way is to do it by yourself, silently, by mentally repeating all your worries. The second way, which some people prefer, is to say your worries out loud, instead of silently, even if you end up talking to yourself. That seems a

little silly to people, but of course you'll be in a private place with the door closed, so no one will be listening to you. I recommend that my clients speak their worries into a tape recorder. Recording may help you feel as though you were talking directly to someone instead of talking to the walls. If you try it this way, you don't need to listen to the tape when you're done. Just flip it over and record on the other side the next time.

The third way is to use a *worry coach*. This is someone who is willing to listen to your worries and support you in a specific way. Here, the worrier's goal is to keep talking with as little assistance as possible.

The coach's job is to offer a question or a statement only if the worrier can't think of anything else to say. So coaches should let a few moments pass to see if the worrier comes up with another worry. If not, there are a few specific comments or questions that he or she can offer. The first one is to ask you to "say more about being worried." The second is to ask, "What else about this topic worries you?" And third, "What other topics worry you when you think about this problem?" You can see these kinds of comments or questions aren't that different from one another. They simply bring your attention back to the topic at hand, that is, "Keep worrying." The goal is to discuss your worries thoroughly and passionately.

Worry Time: What the Coach Says

Coach: In this practice, the worrier's goal is to keep talking without any assistance. Your job is to offer a question or statement only if the worrier has run out of things to say. Say the following as often as needed:

1. "Say more about being worried."
2. "How else does [this issue] worry you?"
3. "What else are you worried about?"
4. (If the person begins talking about the positive side)
"Only talk about your worries, please."
5. (If the person runs out of worries) "Tell me again about those worries you've mentioned."

If you run out of things to say, then the coach should say, "Tell me again about those worries you've already mentioned." When you begin to talk about the positive side of things, then the coach should interrupt and remind you to only speak about your worries. (Don't get me wrong. It's fine to reassure yourself, just not during this exercise!

These statements and questions should be the only ones that the coach uses. Don't let your coach get off the track by playing the *me-too* game: "Yeah, I've had that problem before, too. I can really understand how troubling that must be for you." The coach should keep comments to a minimum; whenever possible he or she should just listen and nod and let you know when your time is up.

Let's assume that you typically resist your worries or try to argue yourself out of them. How well is that working for you? If you're like most people, it's not working very well. It is an understandable approach, but resistance in itself may promote your worries. In Worry Time you actually support the worries. You

give them space, you don't fight them. And when you truly let them have all that space, noisy worries change. They may still be there; but if you are not fighting them, their intensity diminishes.

This is one of those techniques that you can never fully trust until you apply it. It sounds too simple to work. Let me tell you that it can work when you apply it to the "noise" of your worries.

Will Worry Time work for you? I challenge you to experiment with it just once. Choose any problem in your life these days in which you have repetitious, unproductive thoughts. Give yourself a full ten minutes of Worry Time, and see if you can even last the whole time without running out of things to say.

I bet you won't make it, even if it's a problem you typically dwell on throughout the day! Because I'll also bet that when you worry, you simultaneously struggle against the worry by trying to think more positively or by trying to stop the thoughts. When you stop struggling, and you voluntarily choose to worry, then thoughts that tended to last all day can't even sustain themselves for ten minutes.

Worry Time and postponing can work together as a great team of skills during your day. If you have a designated Worry Time set up already, then when you begin to dwell on your worries at the office, you'll know what to say. "At 5:15 I'm already scheduled to worry about this. I'm going to postpone this worry until 5:15. That's the perfect time to pay attention to these thoughts."

After you have been using Worry Time for a few days, then you may also have trouble filling that ten minutes with worries about that issue. So when your worries spring up unannounced at other times of the day, you might even end up saying, "Hey, I need this worry to fill my time at 5:15. I'm saving this thought!" By investing time twice a day to worry formally, you end up reducing the amount of time you worry during the rest of the day. And those worries begin to get so old that they just don't have the punch to them anymore. It will be much easier than to say, "No, I don't really want to think about that anymore. I'd rather [read my book, talk with friends, enjoy my day, get my work done]."

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