

Worry

MCC Medical Patient Education Module

"Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight."

Benjamin Franklin

"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one."

Elbert Hubbard

"If you ask what is the single most important key to longevity, I would have to say it is avoiding worry, stress and tension. And if you didn't ask me, I'd still have to say it."

George F. Burns

Worries. They can circle around and around in your head. Becoming louder and louder as they sap your strength and make you feel you weaker. It's no fun. So, what can you do about it? Here are five timeless thoughts to help you overcome or at least lessen the worries in your life. I hope you find something helpful.

1. 80-90 percent of what you fear will happen never really come into reality.

"When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened."

Winston Churchill

"If you want to test your memory, try to recall what you were worrying about one year ago today."

E. Joseph Cossman

This is a big one but one that is easy to forget about. Most things you fear will happen never happen. They are just monsters in your own mind. And if they happen then they will most often not be as painful or bad as you expected. Worrying is most often just a waste of time.

This is of course easy to say. But if you remind yourself of how little of what you feared throughout your life that has actually happened you can start to release more and more of that worry from your thoughts.

2. Don't mountains out of molehills.

"Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow."

Swedish Proverb

"Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained."

Arthur Somers Roche

"If you treat every situation as a life and death matter, you'll die a lot of times."

Dean Smith

It's very easy to fall into the habit of making mountains out of molehills. You think and think about a small problem until it becomes something that you believe may ruin your life.

So why do we do it? Why don't strive to make things easy and simple?

Well, one reason I believe is protection from pain. By making the problem huge can you can invent a helpful excuse to convince yourself to not take action.

Another reason is that the ego wants more. It wants to feel better or worse than someone else. By making things more complicated than they need to be you can make them feel very important. And since you are involved in these important things, since you have these BIG problems, well, then you have to be important too, right? Plus, by doing so you can get a lot of attention and comfort from other people.

So how do you get out of the habit of making mountains of molehills? Three tips:

- **Zoom out.** Ask questions that widen your current perspective. Questions like: "Does someone have it worse on the planet?" The answer may not result in positive thoughts, but it can sure snap you of a somewhat childish "poor, poor me..." attitude pretty quickly. This question changes the perspective from a narrow, self-centred one into a much wider one and helps me to lighten up about my situation and to be grateful about my life.
- **Bring awareness to you own thought patterns.** Ask yourself questions like: "Honestly, am I overcomplicating this?" and "What is the simplest and most straightforward solution to my problem that I may be avoiding to protect myself from pain?"
- **Realize that much of this is in your head.** Your relationships to what you want to achieve are – just like your relationships to people – to a large extent just in your head. Think that something is easy and simple instead of "heavy" and complicated and your perception of that external thing you want to achieve tends to change too. Experiment and find healthy and effective relationships to what you want to achieve instead of just seeing something like many people may do.

3. Let go of that familiarity and certainty.

"Worry is like a rocking chair—it gives you something to do but it doesn't get you anywhere."

Unknown

"People become attached to their burdens sometimes more than the burdens are attached to them."

George Bernard Shaw

Whatever you have been doing perhaps for decades feels familiar and comfortable. Even if it may be something destructive as worrying. Taking a leap of faith and going into the unknown, making a change that may turn out to be positive, can feel scarier and more uncomfortable than what you are used to. Even if what you are used to is worse in the long run.

But at some point you have to make up your mind to start letting go of that old familiar part of yourself. You have to fill up the space all that worrying used take up with new thinking. It may feel uncomfortable. It is not so intimately familiar as your past thoughts.

It can be scary and exciting at the same time because now you are not just someone who sees him/herself as worrier and that uses some techniques to lessen that. You are instead making a deep change to who you are, to how you view yourself. You are letting go of something that has been a big part of you and are leaving it at the side of the road.

One great tip that I have learned for making it easier to let go is to first accept it. Then to let it go. When you accept something instead of resisting it you stop feeding more energy into your problem and making it even bigger. A bit counterintuitive.

This is useful when it comes to letting go. If you first accept what you want to let go you aren't so emotionally attached to it and still feeding it with your focus and energy. And so it becomes less powerful and easier to just drop. As long as you resist it then it will be hard to let it go.

Another helpful hint for letting go is found in tip #1 in this article. All that worrying in your past may not have been very accurate at all. So perhaps it's a smart choice to let go of that habit?

4. Focus on a solution.

"There is a great difference between worry and concern. A worried person sees a problem, and a concerned person solves a problem."

Harold Stephen

"The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work."

Robert Frost

"You can't wring your hands and roll up your sleeves at the same time."

Pat Schroeder

To move out of worry it's very helpful to just start moving and taking action to solve what you are concerned about.

Two tips that have helped me to take action more consistently are:

Using a morning routine.

This is perhaps the most powerful tip I have found so far in this area. You simply set up a routine in the morning that you do as soon as you wake up. This works so well because what you do early in the day often sets the context for your day. As humans we have a strong tendency to want to be consistent with what we have done before. That's one big reason why a bad start often leads to a bad day and a good start often leads to a good day. Read all about my and other people's morning routines in [this article](#).

Focusing on and taking responsibility for the process, not the potential results.

I use this when I workout. I don't take responsibility for the results in my mind. I take responsibility for showing up and doing my workout. The results have come anyway from that consistent action. And this makes it easier for me to take this action when I know that is all I need to focus on. Instead of using half of the energy and focus I have available on hoping that I "reach my goal real, real soon".

Focus on the process and you will be a lot more relaxed and prone to continue than if you stare yourself blind on the potential results that never come as quickly as you want to and puts you on an emotional rollercoaster from day to day.

5. Tomorrow will come anyway. Live and fully enjoy here and now.

"Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy."

Leo F. Buscaglia

It may sometimes seem that by worrying we can lessen the sorrow of tomorrow. But it never works. It only sucks the life out of today and this moment.

To be able to live better today and to be able to take that action to prevent the possible sorrow it's important to learn to live in the present moment. Because it's there that you can do things in the best possible way with your focus fully on what you are doing.

- **Focus on what's right in front of you.** Or around you. Or on you. Use your senses. Just look at what's right in front of you right now. Listen to the sounds around you. Feel the fabric of your clothes and focus on how they feel. Be still right there and just take in the world around you.
- **Pick up the vibe from present people.** If you know someone that is more present than most people then you can pick his/her vibe of presence (just like you can pick up positivity or enthusiasm from people). If you don't know someone like that then I have often recommended listening/watching to Eckhart Tolle in the past. I still do. I especially like his audiobook "Stillness Speaks". Another guy that I find helpful for picking up presence from is Wayne Dyer.