

Conquer Worry

There is no shortage of things to worry about. From personal issues and professional demands, to health concerns, safety, and the weather – big or small, we can all find ourselves fretting over just about anything. But don't worry, worrying is normal. In fact, it can actually be beneficial at times. Just as with stress – which also tends to get a bad rap despite its positive side – some amount of worry is good for us. It keeps us motivated, productive, and on the lookout for obstacles that may interfere with our goals.

We'll never be immune to letting worry occasionally get the best of us; though, with practice and some help from your **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**, you can learn to repurpose your anxious energy. Here are some suggestions for regaining control over your concerns.

“Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.”

– Swedish Proverb

Tame your triggers

The first step to conquering your worry is to identify the things that activate or intensify it for you, then come up with strategies for dealing with these items. If you worry about money, for example, set a strict budget for any online shopping, and then keep to it. If an inundation of news is a trigger for you, limit your exposure. Pick one source – the televised nightly world news, perhaps – and vow to engage in only that program, only once each day.

In some cases, it may be best to steer clear of certain places, people, or situations altogether if possible. For instance, if your sister tends to also be a worrier or she gets worked up easily, it may be best to avoid her when you're feeling particularly anxious. Instead, reach out to your consistently calm and supportive friend who has a knack for helping you sort through your thoughts.

Either way, having even the simplest solution in place ahead of time – such as a breathing exercise or an internal mantra – can do wonders for mitigating your worry.

Cultivate the Calm

Worry management isn't only about in-the-moment answers. The more you foster a worry-less existence, the more control you will have over your worrisome thoughts and actions in general. To start, try incorporating these practices into your daily routine.

- ***Rationalize and reset***

Much of what we worry about stems from *perceived* threats that pose no real danger. We overgeneralize, fear outcomes that ultimately never materialize, and “*what-if*” ourselves to death. So, before you work yourself into a tizzy, stop and analyze the situation: Is this a rational thought? Will having this thought help in any way?

- ***Repeat after me: “No.”***

Often we inadvertently add to our own stress and worry by always saying yes to what others ask of us. Perhaps you're a natural caretaker, or you're afraid to turn down a work project – add a predisposition for worrying and suddenly you're overwhelmed, drowning in commitments, and feeling like you're about to collapse.

Know your limits and start saying *no*. You'll be surprised at how flexible and understanding people can be, especially when you're honest about it as opposed to overpromising only to feel more pressure or under-deliver in the end.

- ***Take care of yourself***

Don't forget that your lifestyle can play a huge role in how much you worry. Pay attention to your diet, exercise, and sleep habits. Limit caffeine and nicotine, which can increase your heart rate. And get moving – the more active you are, the less time your brain has to conjure up insignificant worries.

And remember to relax. Practice deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness to fend off uninvited thoughts.

WHEN TO WORRY ABOUT YOUR WORRYING

There's a difference between the normal kind of worrying, and worrying so much that it interferes with your daily life, relationships, and productivity. Know what is common versus concerning by comparing the symptoms of worry and anxiety.

COMMON	CONCERN
1. Worry tends to be focused on thoughts in our heads	Anxiety is more visceral and is felt throughout the body
2. Worry tends to be more specific (e.g., arriving at the airport on time)	Anxiety is more general (e.g., the overall concept of flying)
3. Worry focuses on verbal thoughts	Anxiety includes verbal thoughts <i>and</i> mental images
4. Worry triggers problem-solving	Anxiety does not
5. Worry creates mild emotional distress	Anxiety generates severe distress
6. Concerns are realistic	Concerns are irrational or perceived
7. Worry tends to be controllable	Anxiety is much less controllable
8. Worry tends to be a temporary state	Anxiety can linger
9. Worry doesn't impact personal/professional function	Anxiety feels restless, uncomfortable, and as if you're incapable of concentrating

(Adapted from [PsychologyToday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com))

If you think you may have anxiety, reach out to your EAP for support.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees and their family members at no cost.

24 HOURS A DAY

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