



Understanding worry

Fact sheet

What is worry?

In our busy world, it's not unusual to feel worried at times. You may worry about your family, your job, your health and other personal issues. You may worry about friends and your community. And you may worry about issues facing the entire world. Sometimes, though, worry becomes a problem. Worry might disrupt your daily routine, interfering with your ability to focus at work, for example, or keeping you from falling asleep at night. More seriously, you might find yourself unable to do anything about worry, until it gets to the point where worry controls your life.

What you can do?

If you feel that worrying has become a problem for you, you can help yourself and you can seek professional help. Self-help methods for dealing with chronic worry generally focus on two areas:

1. Changing your thoughts, and
2. Changing your behaviour

Cognitive-behavioural therapy, which is often used by mental health professionals to treat anxiety disorders, focuses on the same two areas: 'cognitive' having to do with how you think and 'behavioural' having to do with what you do.

Changing your thoughts

Changing how you think about your problems is not an overnight process, but you can make use of exercises to help you catch thinking patterns that may be adding to your distress.

Some common thinking patterns for people who chronically worry are:

- negatively exaggerating the outcome of a particular problem, and
- thinking about events that are not likely to take place.

Basically, if you are a chronic worrier, there is a good chance that you are often expecting the worst to happen. You may indeed have problems, as we all do, but, for you, the small problems become big and the big problems become unmanageable.

To change the way you think about your problems, you will need to catch yourself when you are worrying about them. Write down what you are thinking and how you are thinking about your problems. After keeping track of your thinking for a week or so, you will then want to work on changing the pattern. For each negative thought you have about a problem, rewrite the thought in a positive way. For example,

Negative thought: My son is never going to get the right sort of treatment.

Positive rewrite: My son has a good team of people around him that provide him with a good support network, including his family and his doctor. When he is ready to start acknowledging and getting help for his illness and his drug use we will be there to help him. What I can do now is continue giving him support and encouragement.

When you write down your negative thoughts for a week, you will notice some patterns. When you create your positive counter-thoughts, begin practicing them

by looking at your list when you begin to worry. The process requires practice, as all cognitive exercises do, but, with practice, you will be able to think positive counter-thoughts without your list.

Changing your behaviour

Chronic worriers often find themselves reacting to problem after problem, putting out fire after fire, so to speak. A chronic worrier may always feel on the edge of disaster. If you find yourself worrying all the time, you may not be able to focus on your work. In that case, you will need to learn to start acting on your problems rather than reacting to them. Most of us know about time management and scheduling and lists. If you're a chronic worrier, you will need to find a way to work with your time that helps you. It's a matter of taking control, as well as learning what you cannot control.

As with the cognitive exercise described earlier, writing down your worries is important in changing your behaviour. There are sometimes things that you can do to reduce worry. For example, if you are worried about your son/daughter stealing money from you for drugs you can ensure that there is no money left lying around the house to provide the temptation. You may also find, when you write down your worries, that you think frequently about issues and problems over which you have no control, such as whether or not your son/daughter wants to stop using drugs. These may, of course, be very important to you, but they should not be consuming you. Most likely, however, you will not be able to let go of these worries until you begin working on the worries you can control.

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continued...

**One in five Australians is
affected by mental illness.**

Five in five can help.

You may feel overwhelmed when you write down all that worries you. There will be problems that you need to solve in the near future. Otherwise, though, consider changing your behaviour from this point onward. Learn to manage your time beginning now, and let the past be the past.

Another behaviour you may want to add to your life is the ongoing practice of relaxation. There are a number of ways you can add relaxation to your life, such as with basic relaxation techniques or meditation, but all will give you the ability to calm down and focus, with practice. Exercise is another behaviour that may help you feel better and more focused, with time.

Useful references

Anxiety Recovery Centre Victoria
www.arcvic.com.au

OCD & Anxiety Helpline (ARCVic)
(03) 9576 2499

National Alliance of the Mentally Ill (USA)
www.nami.org

ARAFEMI
www.vicnet.net.au/~arafemi

Carers Victoria
www.carersvic.org.au

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria
www.mifellowship.org

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria fact sheets

What can friends and family do to help
a person experiencing mental illness?

Effective communication

Family and carer supports and services

Understanding guilt



mental illness
fellowship victoria

for people with mental illness,
their families and friends

For information and support

Helpline 03 9482 4189 or help@mifellowship.org (9am – 5pm Monday to Friday)

Fairfield Place, 276 Heidelberg Road Fairfield Vic 3078. PO Box 359 Clifton Hill Vic 3068.

Telephone Melbourne 03 9482 4199 **Facsimile** 03 9482 4871 **Email** enquiries@mifellowship.org

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Barwon 03 5229 8827 **Loddon Mallee** 0414 641 091 **www.mifellowship.org**

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