

How to Break the 'Worry-Go-Round' Cycle



Did you know that constant worry can actually kill you?

If you think that worry or anxiety can do no more harm than causing an occasional headache or stomach upset – you are wrong.

Excessive worry over a long period of time can become one of the major causes behind many life-threatening diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and heart disease.

The physical causes like poor lifestyle, wrong eating habits, lack of exercise, etc. are just the superficial part. Worry, anxiety or excessive stress is the real, behind-the-curtain villain.

So what exactly is this thing called 'worry'?

In the simplest of words, worry or anxiety is negative imagination about the future.

It is when we create negative 'what if' scenarios about something in our mind that we become worried or anxious.

For example, think of a mother who worries excessively about her son. How will she react if one day her son doesn't return from school at his usual hours?

She automatically goes into an emotional frenzy where she will imagine all sorts of negative scenarios about 'what might have happened' to her son.

She will imagine him getting hit by a car or getting injured in a fight with other kids or being kidnapped...

What kind of emotions will this mother experience? Obviously of intense fear, anxiety, worry and even panic.

She has no idea about what has actually happened. But her mind has taken her on a wild, frightening ride.

Her symptoms of worry and anxiety are caused purely by the thoughts and imaginings of her own mind.

Worry creates a kind of mental fog that blurs our ability to think rationally. It can deplete our energy and leave us powerless even in the face of ordinary life problems.

To live a happy and fulfilling life we must kick the worry habit out of our minds.

But how do we do that?

You have had this habit all your life. How can you get rid of it now?

Well, you can! Let's see how...

Understand that worry is just a habit

Remember that worry is a learned habit and therefore, it can be unlearned.

Of course, breaking a deeply ingrained habit like worry or anxiety is not easy. One needs to deliberately make changes in his ways of thinking and outlook towards life in general.

This needs a conscious and consistent effort.

However, with some patience and diligent practice, you can outsmart your worry habit and lead a more productive and fulfilling life.

Have you noticed that, like all other habits, worry is an unconscious (or at least semi-conscious) phenomenon?

If you will closely observe yourself while you start feeling anxious, you will find that there is a definite pattern to it.

It goes something like this...

When a certain 'worry-triggering' situation occurs, our well-practiced, automatic, negative "what-if" thinking mechanism kicks in.

As this negative thought process starts gathering momentum, it produces some (again very-well-practiced or conditioned) negative feelings or emotions in our body.

This, in turn, gives rise to more anxiety producing thoughts, which produce more anxious feelings...and this cycle goes on and on.

And before you know, you are already caught up in the whirlwind of a full-blown anxiety attack.

When this goes on for a long period of time, maybe even for a lifetime, it becomes an ingrained pattern that we call as the anxiety disorder or in simple words, the worry habit.

Once you clearly understand and accept that worry is just another habit that can be changed, you are already on your way towards a worry-free life.

How to break this vicious worry-cycle?

Simply by becoming more conscious of your emotional reactions to situations and the underlying thoughts that trigger them, you can start taking apart the foundations of the worry pattern.

But how do you become more conscious?

Well, you will have to learn that skill. And like any other skill, you need to practice it diligently.

Of course, it won't be sensible to start with your life-long worry habit head-on. It is too deep and powerful to handle right now.

A better approach is to start with something you can easily manage - such as your breathing. Or some routine activity that you do without being too much attentive like walking, reading, writing, talking, eating, exercising, etc.

Just learn to be more attentive to these simple actions and slowly as your ability grows, you will find it easier to become more conscious of your thoughts and feelings including those that produce worry and anxiety.

Tips to live a worry-free life

There is a lot you can do to get rid of your worry habit. Let's talk about a few things you can start doing today to get the better of your chronic anxiety.

- **Learn to live in the present**

Worry happens due to your overactive, negative imagination about a future of doom and gloom.

You can reverse this tendency by developing more present moment awareness. Techniques like mindfulness meditation can greatly help bring your awareness back to the present moment and diminish worry.

Even pleasant physical activities like yoga, walking, running, playing, gardening, etc. if done with awareness can help us come back to the here and now, thus eliminating stress and anxiety.

- **Use your imagination positively**

Another effective way to cut-down the 'what-might-go-wrong' thinking is to deliberately imagine better-feeling, positive 'what-might-go-well' scenarios.

Train your mind to purposefully focus on possible positive outcomes instead of negative ones. This will instantly bring relief from the negative feelings of anxiety.

- **Learn detachment**

We are often too attached to the outcome of a situation. This makes us so stressed and anxious in the present that we cannot even focus adequately on the task at hand.

The holy Hindu scripture Bhagvad Geeta emphasizes on remaining detached to the outcome of your actions. This makes good sense even in the context of our worry issue.

If you deliberately learn to develop a sense of perspective towards life situations and stay more focused on your work than the outcome, you do become more relaxed and worry-free.

- **Worry on purpose**

As strange as this may sound, this works for many chronic worriers. Simply set aside a few minutes as "worry time". Sit and start worrying all you can. Go all out and deliberately try and worry as much as you can for 10 to 15 minutes.

You will be surprised that when you allow your mind all the freedom to worry for a few minutes every day, it quickly learns not to worry at other times of the day.

There are many other ways to diminish the worry habit including diet, exercise, yoga, and even many alternative therapies.

But about that, some other time...

And from now on, don't worry too much about worry!

Instead, try to understand it and use the above mentioned guidelines and techniques to get over it once and for all.

I would love to know how you deal with your fears, worries and anxieties. Do share your thoughts and experiences below in the comments.