

International Journal Of Medical Science And Clinical Inventions

Volume 3 issue 9 2016 page no. 2145-2149 e-ISSN: 2348-991X p-ISSN: 2454-9576

Available Online At: <http://valleyinternational.net/index.php/our-jou/ijmsci>

Worrying Can Work in Your Favour- A Scientific Review

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ABSTRACT: *Our mental impulses, worry probably gets the least respect. We chide overly nervous people for being worrywarts; too much rumination causes worry lines. Unrelenting worry is one of the primary features of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). New research underscores the idea that holding positive beliefs about worry—believing it helps to function as a better person and avoid negative things in life—contributes to maintaining worry and anxiety.*

Key Words : Anxiety, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Worry.

INTRODUCTION:

Psychologists believe that worry, defined as a person's negative thoughts about a future event.¹ It's true that fretting in excess can have significant **side effects**. They advise that abiding nervousness can lead to both fatigue and sleeplessness, even intestinal dysfunction.³

Acute anxiety can affect your focus at work or compel you to seclude yourself from others in the hopes of keeping your phobias at bay. In cases such as these, counseling is likely your best option.³

Chronic worriers operate under the fear processing areas in the brain. The hyper vigilance that is the result can lead to cardiovascular problems, ultimately rendering the body unable to cope properly with stress.¹

When something causes worry, it activates the amygdala (the part of the brain associated with emotional responses and decision making) and hippocampus (the area connected to memory consolidation). The central nervous system may trigger the release of the stress hormone cortisol, causing your heart rate to spike.³

Prolonged periods of stress even weakened participants' endocrine and immune function. Some studies reported that excess worry is linked to elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which slows immune responses and may make chronic worriers more susceptible to disease.¹

FAST FACTS - SPIRALING OUT OF CONTROL CAUSE WORRY :

1. Worrying about the future is a natural tendency, but for some people it is a constant, unwelcome state of mind. These chronic worriers crave a sense of control they can never seem to find.¹
2. Spending too much time fretting actually undermines the body's ability to react to stress, weakening the cardiovascular system and disrupting normal emotional functioning.¹
3. When over worrying seriously threatens a person's health and happiness, drugs or psychotherapy can help.¹

An improved understanding of how excessive worry (the thought-driven aspect), which is linked with anxiety (the emotional element), affects our

mental and physical functions can help us cope with this often self-induced foible.¹

But Wegner says “*By trying to put a worry or a thought out of our mind, it only makes the worry worse. Two emotion-processing areas of the brain are involving here in worry, Ultimately it causes sensitizing our brain i.e. the anterior insula and the amygdala*”.¹

Two mental processes play role at a time here are:¹

- **The First**, by consciously looking for distractions from the nagging worry, we remain somewhat aware of the undesired thought.
- **The second** reason the suppression fails is that often making us an unconscious effort to catch our self thinking of the forbidden thought.

HOW COPE WITH THE STRESSES OF EVERY DAY LIFE :

Leahy Robert offers *six simple tips and tricks* which can use to cope with the stresses of every day life.¹

1. Identify productive and unproductive worry:

First, determine whether your worries will help you find practical solutions to a dilemma.

- If “**Yes**, my worries can be constructive,” write a to-do list with explicit steps to help solve the problem.
- If the answer is “**No**, my worries are not helping me,” use some of the techniques below to help deal with unproductive worries.

2. Keep an appointment with your worries :

Write down your unproductive worries throughout the day and set aside a chunk of time, dedicated specifically to thinking about them.

- “You may find you’re not interested in those worries anymore.”

- “Many people find that what they thought they needed an answer to earlier, they don’t care about later in the day.”

3. Learn to accept uncertainty:

Worriers have a hard time accepting they can never have complete control in their lives. That quietly repeating a worry for some times (“I may never fall asleep” or “I could lose my job”) reduces its power. “Most people get bored by their worries and don’t even make it even 20 minutes,” he notes.

4. Be mindful :

Mindfulness, a technique based on Buddhist teachings, preaches staying in the present moment and experiencing all emotions even when they are negative. Leahy explains there are ways to be mindful throughout your day, while deeply immersed in your favorite song or in conversation with friends. Try living in the now by practicing deep breathing. Let your body relax and the tension in your muscles melt away.

5. Reframe your worry:

What happens if a worry comes true? Could you survive losing your job or being dumped? Reframing how you evaluate disappointments in life can take the sting out of failure, Leahy says. Create a positive spin by asking yourself what you have learned from your bad experiences. Make a list of things for which you are grateful.

6. Put worries in perspective:

Examine past worries. Do you have a hard time remembering what they are? Very likely this means that those worries never came true or that you were able to cope and forget, Leahy says.

RESEARCH ON BENEFIT OF WORRY :

1. **Psychologist Graham Davey** of the University of Sussex in England was one of the first experts to suggest *potential plus sides to worry*. In a 1994 study Davey explored a range of consequences stemming from this natural tendency; he found people reported

that although fretting can make things worse, it can also be constructive, helping to motivate them to take action, resolve problems and reduce anxiety.¹

2. More recent research supports the idea that elevated levels of worry can improve performance. In 2005 psychologist Maya Tamir, at Stanford University, showed that neurotic students were more likely to believe that '*increasing their level of worry when working on a cognitively demanding task, such as a test, would allow them to excel*'. It may also encourage action.¹
3. Worrying can help us perform better. When our bodies are in a stressed state -- say, due to a looming deadline - blood flow increases to our brain, which helps us think more clearly, and our mood becomes more serious, promoting increased concentration.⁴
4. A recent study from the University of Rochester Medical Center even found that people who consider themselves neurotic (you might call them worrywarts) and are also conscientious (organized and responsible) and **have lower levels of a protein called Interleukin 6, which, at higher concentrations, is associated with inflammatory precursors to conditions such as heart disease, stroke, asthma, diabetes and some cancers.**⁴
5. A long-term study conducted over 80 years found that people who always see the world through rose-colored glasses do not live as long as those who have a tendency to worry . A little worry goes a long way.⁴
6. Mayer Andre , During his graduate studies at Lake head University in Thunder Bay, Ont., Penney, explored the connections between emotional disorders and intelligence. Using a sample group of undergraduate students, he and his colleagues found that those with higher verbal aptitude—a greater vocabulary and ability to articulate complex ideas—tended to report higher levels of worry and rumination. Given its problem-solving benefits, worry may also be a sign of increased brainpower. i.e. Worrying is often a sign of intelligence.³
7. A 2012 study published in *Frontiers in Evolutionary Neuroscience* found a correlation between both high intelligence and anxiety and the depletion of the nutrient choline in one area of the brain, suggesting the two traits may have evolved in tandem. Lead author Jeremy Coplan told *Science Daily* that worry may prompt many of us to avoid threatening situations, which likely means those people have a higher survival rate. So if you're a nervous Nellie by nature, take heart: it's possible all that worry may be a key to evolutionary success.³
8. Worrying may have evolved along with intelligence as a beneficial trait, according to scientists who found that high intelligence and worry both correlate with brain activity measured by the depletion of the nutrient choline in the subcortical white matter of the brain. According to the researchers, this suggests that intelligence may have co-evolved with worry in humans.⁵
9. Baker Brendan says that "One study (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120412153018.htm>) suggested that our worrying may actually have co-evolved with intelligence. It suggests that worrying can help us keep away from dangerous situations and has helped us to have higher survival rates.
10. Positive beliefs about worry are theorized to maintain excessive and uncontrollable worry, the hallmark of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The Why Worry-II (WW-II) is a 25-item revised questionnaire designed to measure five positive beliefs about worry. These five beliefs are that worry: (a) facilitates problem solving; (b) enhances motivation; (c) protects against negative emotions; (d) prevents negative outcomes; and (e) reflects a positive personality trait. The main goal of this study was to assess the WW-II's psychometric

properties, including its factor structure. Undergraduate participants (N = 309) completed the WW-II, and measures of worry, depression, anxiety, and positive and negative beliefs about worry. Overall, the results suggest that the five-factor model is a good fit to the data. The WW-II demonstrated excellent internal consistency, good test–retest reliability at six weeks, and evidence of convergent and divergent validity. The WW-II also uniquely predicted worry severity. Overall, our findings suggest that the WW-II has a five-factor structure congruent with theoretical predictions, sound psychometric properties, and a unique relationship to excessive worry. The theoretical and clinical implications of these findings are discussed.⁷

SEVERAL SPECIFIC POSITIVE BELIEFS ABOUT WORRY HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED, INCLUDING THAT WORRY:

1. Charlie Kurth, an assistant professor of Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis says - The key is to keep it in check that “As with other emotions the Anxiety is something we have the ability to shape to some extent to connect the productive power of this impulse”.³
2. One approach is to increase your self-awareness and notice physical manifestations of worry. Once you clue into what your body is telling you, you can try to disarm your anxiety— or, at the very least, better prepare yourself for a stressful situation.³
3. Charlie Kurth says that “ Rather than focusing your energy on the fact that you’re anxious, it’s helpful to address the source of the anxiety itself”.³
4. Charlie Kurth says - Worrying helps prepare us for threats - It’s upsetting, sure, but the first inkling of anxiety serves us well, because it can heighten our awareness of potential danger and force us to gather more

information about the situation to better address the uncertain threat we face.

5. During worry in the unreliable zone, you might try to find a better-lit, more settled area.³
6. Facilitates problem solving⁷
7. Enhances motivation⁷
8. Protects against negative emotions in the event of a negative outcome⁷
9. Prevents negative outcomes in and of itself⁷
10. Reflects a positive personality trait (akin to conscientiousness).⁷
11. Quote from Christine Calmes, a postdoctoral fellow at the VA Capitol Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center, Baltimore, who even suggests that “ **those individuals that are more successful at life actually worry a little more**”.⁶
12. Worrying switches our brain on! It helps us to actually take a situation seriously. It helps us to think through different alternatives to a situation. It helps us plan for the future.⁶

CONCLUSION:

The two specific positive beliefs about worry may have a particularly strong relationship with worry itself; the beliefs that “worry facilitates problem solving” and “worry protects against negative emotions (in the event of a negative event)” both uniquely predicted worry severity after controlling for anxiety and depression.⁷

But there is good news. Challenging your beliefs about the benefits of worry can help to reduce worry and anxiety.

1. Worry Facilitates problem solving⁷
2. Worry Enhances motivation⁷
3. Worry Protects against negative emotions in the event of a negative outcome⁷
4. Worry Prevents negative outcomes in and of itself⁷
5. Worry Reflects a positive personality trait (akin to conscientiousness).⁷

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