Worry and Anxiety

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Worry More to Worry Less

You worry about big things. You worry about little things. You worry about so many things that it seems that all you do anymore is worry. Your friends tell you that you worry too much. They say, “Just relax and you’ll be fine” or “Don’t let it get to you.” Clearly, your friends have not dealt with anxiety.

The more you try to not worry or think about the triggers, the worse your anxiety gets. Left untreated, anxiety will grow and build leaving room for little else in your life. Anxiety works to make you think that the more you worry the safer you are. You know that this does not make sense but refuting your thoughts and feelings is challenging.

Prescribed Worrying

There is an answer. Many therapists use a technique called prescribed worry. This strategy is somewhat paradoxical in that worrying more helps you to worry less. Here’s how to make worry work for you:

- **Self-monitor** – You already know that anxiety has become too intense, frequent or long in duration. Start to realize and accept the negative impact that anxiety has in your life. Begin to rate your anxiety on a 1-10 scale throughout the day and find periods of low and high symptoms. This will help track changes over time and look for patterns.
- **Find the time** – The best prescribed worry is done daily at the same time. The information gained from the step above can serve as your guide to select a good time to worry. Avoid times when your anxiety peaks or is very low. Find a midrange period and consider experimenting with morning, afternoon or evening. If bedtime is very difficult due to worrisome thoughts keeping you up, complete prescribed worry about an hour before bed.
- **Find the place** – The location of your prescribed worry is as important as the time that you do it. A bathroom is typically a great fit since a mirror is readily available and the bathroom carries a level of privacy with it. An appropriate site will be quiet, free from interruptions and distraction-free.
- **Worry** – During a prescribed worry session, you will go to your chosen location at your chosen time, look in the mirror and worry. The goal is to verbalize all of your worries, anxieties and fears to yourself. Most people with anxiety feel like there is an endless parade of negative thoughts constantly marching through their mind. Prescribed worry challenges this notion and most people find that infinite worry truly amounts to a handful of stressors. The act of hearing you say them makes the worries more tangible and easier to address with action. Plan to set aside 10 minutes to worry but many find that they run out of things to say quickly.

- **Act** – Now that you have been able to accurately identify the stressors in your life. Spend 20 minutes working on a game plan and methods to problem-solve in writing. Set goals to accomplish before tomorrow’s prescribed worrying session. If worries return following your session, simply refer to your written plan to remind you of the next step.

Conclusion

It is time to stop wasting time and emotional energy trying to resist worry and anxiety. Plan to worry and do so in an effective way. New worries will surely develop but once you begin a good routine of verbalizing and acting, there is no limit to the problems you will be able to solve.