

BRIEF ARTICLE

HOW TO STOP WORRYING AND START LIVING!



Dr Joe Armstrong

OVERCOMING WORRY

- Notice when you are worrying
- Separate productive worry from unproductive worry
- For productive worry, decide what needs to be done and do it!
- For unproductive worry, learn to face up to your fears and to tolerate uncertainty
- Focus your attention in the present moment and immerse yourself in what you are doing
- As best you can, start living your life more fully

ABOUT CBT

- A practical, goal-focused form of talking therapy
- Looks at how thinking effects how we feel and act & how what we do effects how we think and feel
- Proven to help overcome a wide range of emotional & physical problems
- Recommended by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) as therapy of choice for anxiety disorders and depression

RECOMMENDED READING

Meares and Freeston (2008)
Overcoming worry: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques. Robinson Publishers.

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*Everybody worries, but for some people it can start to take over and have a negative impact on the quality of their life. In this article, Dr Joe Armstrong outlines the nature of worry and how **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** can help you to stop worrying excessively and start enjoying life.*

What do you worry about? Perhaps you worry about your health, work, money or about what other people think about you. You may even worry about having 'weird' or unacceptable thoughts and feelings or about bad things happening to you and to other people. Sound familiar?

If you find yourself worrying about one or more of these kinds of things, well, you are not alone! We all worry, but for some people worry can get out of control and become excessive and out of proportion to the reality of the situation. If you tend to worry a lot, then you will know from first-hand experience of the negative impact it can have on the quality of your life. The good news is that life doesn't have to be like this. You can learn how to control your worry and start enjoying life again using techniques from a form of talking therapy called Cognitive Behavioural therapy or CBT to give it its shorthand name. First, let me say something about what worry is, and then outline some of the ways CBT can help you to deal with it.

So, what is worry? For a start, worry tends to be about things that might happen in the future. It is at the heart of all forms of anxiety and research suggests that it is associated with depression. If you worry too much then you are likely to be very familiar with the question, 'What if'? You may find that you get stuck in unhelpful thinking patterns where you imagine and dwell on negative or disastrous outcomes to some future event. To deal with your worries you may tell yourself things like, "Worrying about this problem will help me to find a

solution". These thoughts may be helpful in some circumstances but here's the catch, excessive worrying reduces our capacity to act and solve problems and only serves to fuel doubt and more worry. When worry is left unchecked it can take control of your life to the point where your thoughts seem like a whirlwind from which there is no escape. In the long term this can lead to exhaustion and a sense of demoralisation.

But there is a way out of excessive worrying and the distress it brings with it. One useful CBT technique is to learn to distinguish between productive and unproductive worry. For instance, productive or real event worries are things that can usually be addressed by doing something now, whereas so-called unproductive or hypothetical worries, the 'What if' kinds of worries, are things that can't be addressed by taking action to sort them out in the present. That's where learning to face up to your fears come into play. Another CBT technique is to stop doing things that maintain worry such as, avoiding and overanalysing things, seeking reassurance, making excessive lists, distraction and so on.

Overcoming worry is often about learning to live with uncertainty, which is a fact of life for all of us. Trying to control things that can't be controlled is just a recipe for unnecessary worry. As Michel de Montaigne once said, "My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened." So, as best you can put worry in its place and start living!