

AN EXERCISE TO MANAGE WORRY

It can seem counterintuitive, but one way to manage your feelings of worry and stress is to schedule 'worry time'. This is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) tool to help take control of the frequency and timing of your thoughts of worry.

By containing your worry to designated periods, you can free up the mind for other more important or more enjoyable things, like work, relaxation and quality time spent socialising with friends or family.

How to schedule 'Worry Time'

While this may seem strange or even silly, try the following exercise to help manage your worry. Try not to give in to these feelings by taking control of them.

1. Schedule 'Worry Time' for a set time each day for one whole week.

Put it in your calendar or your daily diary, or set a reminder on your smartphone. Start by setting aside 15 - 30 minutes during the morning or afternoon. Don't schedule worry time right before you go to bed, for obvious reasons.

2. Write down all the worries that you can think of.

During that 15 - 30 minute window, using a pen and paper, write down what's on your mind. Don't put pressure on yourself to find solutions to all of these problems within that short window of time, but if your mind wanders to solutions or problem-solving, that's fine too. Write some of those ideas down.

The process of writing your thoughts down can be therapeutic and can give you a fresh perspective to your troubles in a way which is more effective than simple internal reflection.

Remind yourself at the start and end of your Worry Time that your intention is to contain your worries to this set window. Remind yourself that you will try not to give attention to these worries outside of this Worry Time each day.

3. In between Worry Times, let go of those thoughts.

If you start to worry, tell yourself to set aside those problems until the next designated Worry Time. This will be difficult the first time you try to let go of these thoughts, and may require a lot of reinforcing self-talk. It's also important not to worry about the fact that you are worrying outside of the designated Worry Time. You won't be perfect in this exercise, but the important thing is your intention and efforts. These alone will make a big difference!

4. At the end of the week, look at what you wrote down.

Look at the progression from Day 1 to Day 2 and onwards to Day 7. Do you notice a pattern? Any repeat worries or recurring themes? Did the nature of your worries change or evolve through the week? Reflect on this data. It's common to find a 'Top 10' list of worries that will play out again and again.

5. Repeat the exercise.

As you practice more, you'll start to notice an improvement in your ability to set aside worries to a more appropriate time and place. Think of it like strengthening a muscle, the more you practice, the better you will become and you will start forming new habits or behavioural patterns around managing your worries.

This will help you manage your emotional response to stress, anxiety and pressure over the long term, and build your resilience to tackle setbacks or crises when they strike.

