



Worry: Why We Do it (...and How to Do it Less)

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Worrying Can Be Habit-Forming.

The anguish of anxiety is a drain on our energy and our time. It can seriously diminish our quality of life, health, our job satisfaction and performance. Anxiety is likely to impact our parenting, relationships, and pretty much everything else we do. To be sure, worrying is unpleasant, but it is also very common when we are under excessive stress. This is especially true if it's how we saw the adults around us cope as we were growing up, (or if we see others around us doing it now.) The truth is that worrying is a behavior and as such, can become a kind of "hobby" if we aren't careful. Anxiety gives the mind something to do when it isn't fully occupied with something else. Whenever you notice you're worrying a lot, it's good to take a step back and reassess. *"Will this matter in six months?"* is a good reality check.

But I'm Afraid I'll Forget...

Another kind of worrying has to do with remembering. When you crawl into bed and you turn out the light, does the movie in your head begin? (e.g. *"I must pick up my jacket at the cleaner's. Dental appointment at 4:00 tomorrow. Sister's birthday next Wednesday. Oh--We need eggs."*) Often, if you take a moment just before bedtime to list the things in your mind on a pad on your night table, you can release them for the night and get the sleep you need. They are committed to paper. You won't forget. They will be there in the morning. Now you can remember your jacket once, instead of seventeen times. Sweet dreams!

"Stop That. You'll Worry Yourself Sick!"

Some people get so invested in, and attached to, negative thinking that they just set up camp around their anxiety and break out the marshmallows. If you'd like to find more light and joy in your days, I can assure you it is there. There is a funny law of The Universe: In difficult time, when we begin to look for the lighter side of life...There it *is!* Because there is constant communication between the mind, body, and if you will, spirit, what we think and feel and believe can significantly impact body processes including immunity, the healing process, digestion, memory, and overall physical and emotional health. Those are pretty good reasons to nip worries in the bud. There is great scientific and psychosocial research being done regarding the impact of belief systems on who we are and become; upon our health and happiness. Some say that in near-future health care one of the first questions a physician will ask will be *"What do you believe about the nature of life, and about your own health?"* Some are headed in that direction already. Take a look at books by Drs. Larry Dossey, Deepak Chopra, and Carl Simonton that discuss the power of belief systems.

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Need Advice? Try Writing Meditation

Control is a funny thing. (Well not "funny" so much as "complicated.") In most cases it truly is an illusion to believe that we can control much of anything these days. Worry is the manifestation of one of the ways in which the mind informs the body. There is an elegant and continuous conversation that takes place at all times between the mind and body, and, if you will, spirit. The emotions are inextricably bound with the events that take place in our lives at every moment, even at a cellular level. I would suggest spending some time doing writing meditations. It's my personal favorite stress management tool when I feel as though my life is happening to me, more than I myself am creating my experiences.

1. Set a timer for two minutes. Think of someone whose wisdom and advice you would welcome. They may be living or dead, real, fictitious, or if you prefer, a spiritual figure.
2. Spend those two minutes writing as fast and furiously as you care to, everything that is making you feel out of control. No holds barred. Don't edit or check your spelling. Just pour out onto paper, or your keyboard, what you are feeling. Many times what you'll find is that somewhere underneath all of that there may be some fear.
3. Now re-set the timer for two more minutes.
4. Write a response *to* yourself regarding everything you've just said. This response might be from a mythical figure, or a religious figure that's meaningful for you. I sometimes write to my grandmother. She was very wise, and she's been gone a long time. By writing a response back from someone whose judgment we trust, whom we wish we could really talk to in that moment, we often find great comfort and amazing insights into whatever it is that is causing our stress. I've been doing this exercise for over thirty years. Each time I begin, I think to myself *"Why should this work? I'm writing the questions... I'm writing the answers..."* All I can tell you is that I've had some amazing revelations and found many of the answers to what's troubling me in this very simple writing exercise.

How to Be...Worry-Free

1. Talk things out with a trusted (and trust-worthy) listener. I cannot tell you how many times I've held a private worry inside and been miserable, only to find that when I shared it with someone I could trust, the worry lost its power. Be selective. Not everyone is a good listener, and not everyone can be trusted to exercise good judgment. A trusted professional or dear friend who knows how to listen is sometimes just the ticket.
2. Big Decision to Make? Sleep on it. When something large is looming, that is not the best time to make any sudden moves. Wherever possible, try to make important decisions after a good night's sleep or a long walk and in the light of day.

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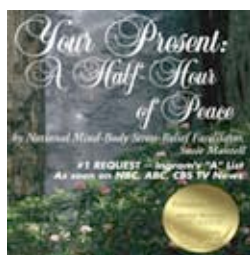


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3. Even when things look bleak, do something kind for somebody else every single day. It is a much healthier daily habit than worrying and there is a cumulative, positive transformation that takes place when it becomes second nature to think about making someone else happy, rather than stewing. *(When we do something nice, and don't tell anyone, there seems to be an even bigger personal benefit. Why do you suppose that is?)*

4. Every moment counts. It is often said that, *"Life is not a dress rehearsal. This is it."* Even when we really are up against the wall in a difficult situation, there is always--always Hope.

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