



Why We Worry About Things We Know We Can't Do Anything About (...and Why it Can Sometimes Actually Help!)

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

Like most people, sometimes I worry.

And if you are even moderately good at it, you can pretty much scare yourself silly that way.

Since most of the worries we worry never come to pass, perhaps we should re-evaluate the use of that time and energy. Please don't misunderstand. We need to be informed and concerned. A hospital visit or a glimpse of the news reminds us that there are matters of great concern in life. We need to pay attention and assess risks. Believe me, I hit the wall some days too - everybody does. It's big and hard and seems impenetrable. Usually when I figure out how to see past it, however, there's really good stuff on the other side. First, not everything important is urgent. When we send that "urgent" signal throughout the mind-body again and again, we activate stress responses that over time, take a toll on our physical and emotional well-being, our relationships and even job satisfaction (not to mention traffic safety)! I've always admired people who are able to make the distinction between Important... and Urgent, knowing when it's time to pursue a negative thought to catalyze change, or when it's wiser to release it, shift focus to something uplifting, or funny, or simply something *not-scary*. Let's look at some of the reasons we worry and what we can do about them.

Q: "Why Do I Worry About Things I Know I Cannot Do Anything About?"

A: I think a lot of people wonder that, but they may not think to ask. They just worry. This is sort of like the way a child will ask why mosquito bites itch. Most adults just scratch, and carry on. Worrying is actually a highly creative process, even at its worst. It is an instinctive use of imagination that sometimes helps us feel as though we have some degree of control and that we are "doing" something about a problem, when in reality there is absolutely nothing we can do. Sometimes ruminating over the same matter again and again is really a way of exploring it and looking for alternatives or solutions. Perhaps we're even hoping to discover that from a different perspective, a mess doesn't look quite so ugly. I call that "productive" worrying, and sometimes it even work, as opposed to useless, *"Well there goes an hour of my life that I can never get back again"* worrying.

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About Catastrophizing

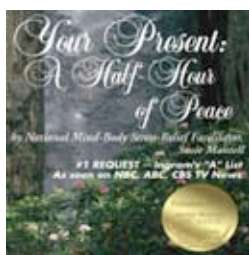
Sometimes known as "catastrophizing," "awfulizing," or "death & destruction fantasies," the worst-case-scenario is often the first-case-scenario. It is a dramatic leap we make from "*hmmm, he's 20 minutes late*" to...

"...and I just know something dreadful has happened, and we will never see him again, and I will be left to raise these small children all by myself. How will I go on? Who will walk our daughter down the aisle in twenty years?"

Of course we know it's far more likely that your husband bumped into an old buddy and they stopped for a quick drink. Isn't it funny that the same twenty minute delay never leads us to think "*...and so he must have stopped to buy a lottery ticket, and he scratched the card and there it was! \$50,000.00!!! I'll bet he's gone to collect his winnings and now -- we can fix the roof, and pay off my college loan and...*"

Some worries are very serious, and I don't mean to make light of those. Personal health and safety, or that of someone we care for, are cause for concern and sometimes, action. At times we can use worrying to view a problem from a new vantage point, and discover that in truth, what had appeared to be a huge, fearsome obstacle was actually a wake-up call redirecting us toward some positive, change. Since most worries never come to pass, unless there is actually something constructive to be done, it may be best for all concerned to release our worries and refocus our thoughts, clearing the mind... and breathing back into *this* moment.

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