

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Time To Reduce The Worrying In Your Life

from the American Counseling Association

Today's world offers plenty of opportunities to worry. From economic problems to family issues to our health, there's an endless list of things that can cause distress.

The reality is that worrying about real things in our lives isn't always as bad as it may seem. Being worried performs a needed function, getting us to focus on an issue and, hopefully, to take action.

But often we may suffer from needless worry. This is worry about things that are imaginary or out of our control. Such worry is harmful as it raises anxiety and stress levels, yet comes from things we really can do nothing about.

Excessive worry is not only unpleasant and stressful, but it can lead to very real health issues. Worrying stimulates our bodies to produce various chemicals, such as adrenaline, that cause physiological reactions, such as muscle tension, increased blood pressure and higher heart rates.

The physical reaction to constant worry can result in headaches, back pain and stomach problems. There's evidence it also affects our immune system, leaving us more vulnerable to viruses and bacteria, perhaps even cancer, and appears to increase the risk of heart attack and strokes.

So, how to reduce worry in your life? First, analyze how real the source of your worrying is. If it's something over which you have control and can do something about, then channel your worry into action. Develop a plan for dealing with the cause of your worry and then carry it out.

But if your source of worry is outside your control, it will continue to cause you emotional and physical issues without allowing you to deal with the problem.

Your goal is to stop such needless worry before it controls your emotions. One way is to "rechannel" your thoughts. Simple diversions, such as music, a book, talking to a friend or exercising, can often help. It takes practice to refocus your thoughts away from needless worry, but it can be done.

Once the worry is under control, then think about how real the source of that worry is and whether it's something you might better ignore, rather than letting it control you.

If you find that chronic worry, especially over things you can't control or influence, is negatively affecting your life, consider talking to a professional counselor who can offer a variety of ways to help reduce the worry in your life.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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