

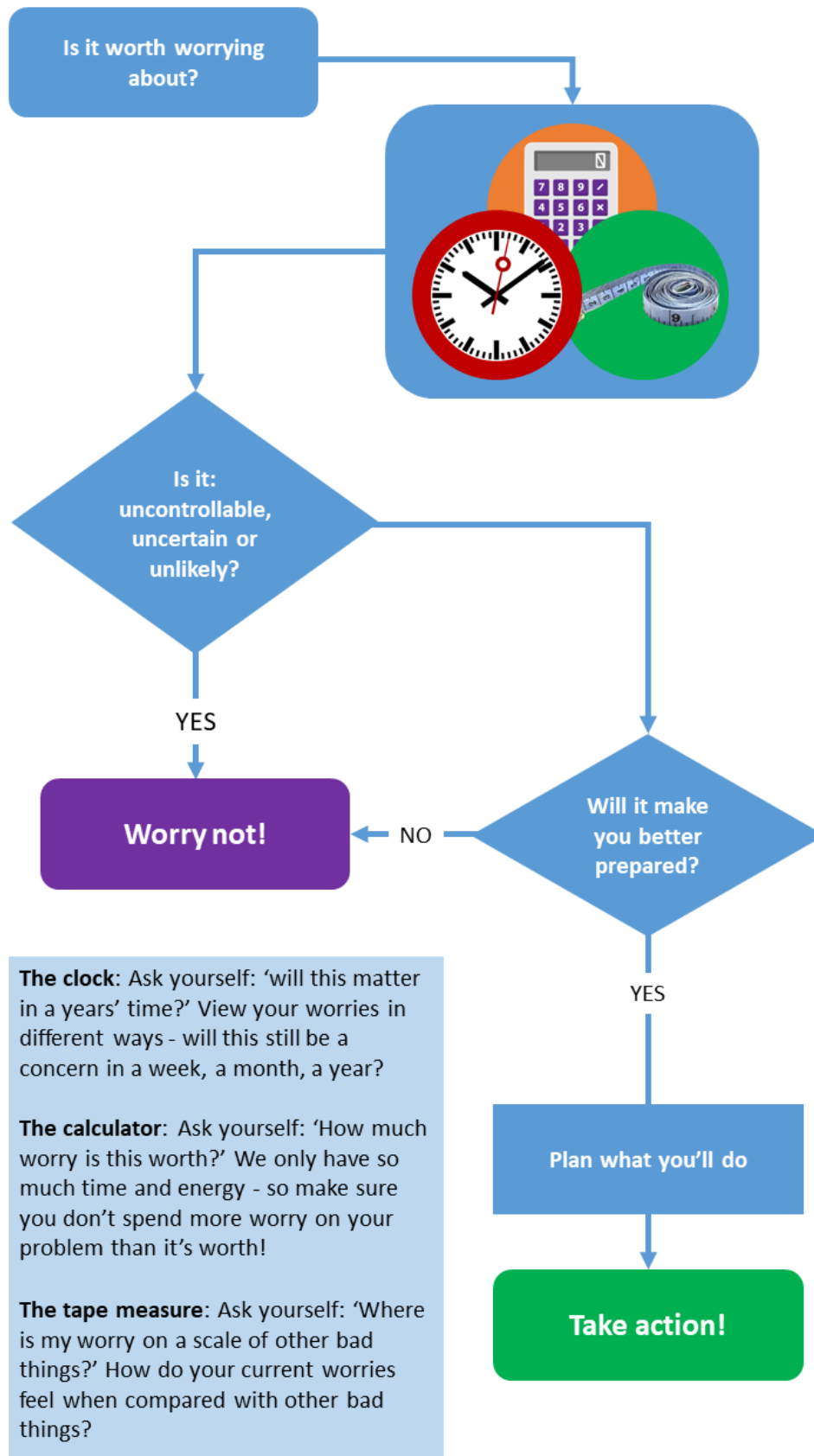
# WORRY NOT!



November 2022 v1.1

MANAGING WORRY IN AN UNCERTAIN CLIMATE

## Overview



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## Why worry?

**'The really bad things that might happen to us are rarely anticipated through worry, and worry rarely allow us any control over them'**

We all worry from time to time, though too much worry leaves us feeling tense and anxious. Even though we might say '*stop worrying, it won't do any good*' it can be hard to stop. Worry can feel important. When we're worrying, we can sometimes feel as though we're doing something constructive. Some people think that if they weren't worrying, they might be seen as a bit 'uncaring' or 'detached'.

When we worry about flying on a plane, we underplay the relative safety of flight (compared to, say, crossing the road) and we may worry, perhaps imagining the plane falling from the sky. The earlier primitive parts of the brain work on the principle that if something feels likely, then it is likely, and can drown out our more rational appraisal of the likelihood of risk. The really bad things that might happen to us are rarely anticipated through worry, and worry rarely allow us any control over them. Worry can be quite hard to stop because it can sometimes be helpful - so it's a good idea to decide whether or not your worry is useful.

## Useful worry leads to action

Worry can be useful when it makes us pay attention. Worrying about the weather won't stop it raining on your washing. However, if you keep an eye on the sky and act to bring in your washing, then knowing that it might rain will have helped.

## Worry can be useful when it's turned into a plan for action

For example, worrying your phone might get cut off can lead you to plan to pay your bill on time.

## Worry can help us remember

Most of us have had the experience of lying awake at night worrying about an unfinished task. It's less likely you'll feel this same level of pressure with tasks you've already completed, because the brain can 'delete' information it sees as unnecessary after it's been

used. Known as the 'Zeigarnik Effect', it's why it's important to complete tasks rather than have them hanging around.

## Worry can be useful when it helps you prepare for action

Worry can help you think about '*what you might do if...*,' or '*what might happen if...*'.

Worrying '*what would happen if my house was burgled*' could make you remember to lock your door when you go out.

## Worry without planning or action is pretty pointless

If worry on its own did something, then we could worry all day to increase our bank balance. On the other hand, taking action such as selling something, working more hours or spending less will directly affect our bank balance. Worrying can be very unproductive.

## Worrying about worrying

The real pain starts when we worry we're worrying too much - we can get into a vicious circle which builds on itself and lead us towards panic. Trying to banish worry by trying to force ourselves to stop worrying rarely works. It's a bit like holding a beach ball under water - it's hard to do, takes up a lot of energy, and we have to keep working at it, or it just bounces right back at us! Better to accept our worries and keep redirecting or thoughts elsewhere. This takes practice, but will eventually work.

## Worry and reassurance

**'No amount of thought will help us feel absolutely certain about things in our uncertain world'**

Some people who worry too much seem to believe (mistakenly, of course) that if they can just think about something enough, they will eventually feel a sense of certainty. No amount of thought will help us feel absolutely certain about things in our uncertain world. Frequently seeking reassurance (e.g. by searching the Internet, asking the same questions over and over, or by repeated consultation with doctors) often just increases worry and uncertainty. Any relief gained from reassurance is often brief and can keep worry going in the long run. Confront your desire for certainty and for control.

## Is it worth worrying about?

There are four things that are not worth worrying about. We call them the 4 'U's' - the **unimportant**, the **uncontrollable**, the **unlikely** and the **uncertain**. Take a look at the flowchart on page one.

### The unimportant

We can fill our life with worries about little things. When you find yourself worrying, ask yourself: *'How important is ... (this thing I'm worrying about)?'*

Here's three pointers to help you answer this question:



**The clock.** Ask yourself: *'will this matter in 5 years' time?'* This is a way of looking at your worry from a long-term point of view. View your worries in different ways - will this still be a concern in a week, a month, a year's time?



**The tape measure.** Ask yourself: *'Where, on a scale of bad experiences, is the thing I'm worried about?'* How does your current worry feel when compared with other bad experiences?



**The calculator.** Ask yourself: *'How much worry is this worth?'* We only have a certain amount of time and energy. Make sure you don't spend more worry on your problem than its worth.

When you have thought about these three points, decide if your worry still seems important.

### The uncontrollable

We have no control over many of the things we worry about. For example, worrying about wrinkles or a grey hair or two doesn't alter the fact that, in a day's time, you'll be a day older. This is, of course, inevitable - even if you worry as hard as you possibly can.

## The unlikely

A lot of worries pose ‘*What if...*’ questions. All kinds of terrible things could happen today or tomorrow but most things are very unlikely. If you allow yourself to worry about the unlikely, then there’ll be no end to your worry. Tackling existing problems is hard enough, don’t waste time and energy on problems that may not exist. We can’t change the past, and we probably have very little control over the future.

## The uncertain

Often we don’t know how something will turn out. Many things we worry about haven’t yet happened and we can only do something once we know what’s happened. For example, worrying that you might have failed an exam is not going to improve your results. It is only once the results are in that you can decide what, if anything, needs to be done.

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## One step at a time

Still worrying? Worries can be divided into two types: those you can do something about, and those you can’t.

### 1. Be clear what the worry is

- Ask yourself ‘*What am I worrying about?*’
- Think about each worry and write them down one at a time, as clearly as you can.

### 2. Decide if something can be done

Look at each worry you’ve written down and ask yourself: ‘*Is there anything I can do about this?*’

Be honest with yourself. If the answer is no, then you can be certain that no matter how much you worry, nothing will change.

Think it through and try to explain to yourself that there is no point in worrying. Try distraction, there are hints on how to do this further on – keep reading!

If the answer is *'yes, something could be done'*, go to step 3 and think about what you could do.

### 3. Write a list of things you could do to address your worry

Look at your list and ask yourself: *'Is there anything I could do right now?'* If there is something you can do right away, then do it. If there is nothing you can do right away, make a plan of when, where and how you will tackle the problem. When you have done what you can, tell yourself that you have done what is needed and continue with your day.

## Distraction

You can only devote your full attention to one thing at a time. Keeping yourself busy leaves less room for worry. Here's some hints on how to distract yourself:

- **Physical activity.** Giving yourself a task to do can be a useful distraction. Keeping yourself physically active through exercise is a good way to stop worrying thoughts.
- **Mental games.** Doing puzzles, crosswords, reciting a poem or a song are all useful distraction exercises.
- **Focus on your surroundings.** Concentrate on a specific detail of the world around you, for example, try a grounding exercise (see later in this leaflet) or guess what people do for a living. Focusing on the outside world can prevent you from thinking about your worries.
- **Swap worry thoughts for something much more interesting.** We all have our own particular favourite thoughts and fantasies. If you catch yourself ruminating over some unpleasant thought or worry - stop; congratulate yourself for noticing what your mind was doing, and switch to thinking about a favourite daydream or fantasy instead.

Sometimes your attention may drift from what you are doing to a worry. If this happens, say to yourself that you've done all you can for now. Remind yourself that there is nothing more that can be done today and, kindly and gently, bring your attention back to your task.

Don't use distraction techniques as a way of avoiding dealing with your worries. Go through the steps above before using distraction.



## Clear your head to help you sleep

We often worry more at night, when we're quieter and less busy. One way of dealing with worrying thoughts is to plan the day ahead. Have a planning session to work through your worries, tasks and problems.

### Planning sessions

- Set aside 15 minutes in the early evening, after your meal.
- Sit in a quiet room. Have a pencil and notebook to hand.
- Think about how the day has gone; write down the things you've achieved.
- Think about problem areas and anything you haven't finished. Write down the way you intend to tackle each of these and when you'll do so. Don't do anything about them at this time. If these matters are on your mind when you are in bed, put them off until daytime. Remind yourself that you've already written a plan.
- If there's a new worry / problem and you can't stop thinking about it, get out of bed, and add it to your planning list. Remind yourself that bed is not the place to think about such things and that you can do no more. The problem is on your list and you will give it your full attention the following day.

### Worry time



When you feel snowed under by worry, set aside a regular half-hour every day to worry. Decide on a time and place that will be your 'worry time' and stick to it. If you start to worry at other times, postpone the worry until worry time and return your focus to what you were doing.

During worry time let your mind worry freely. Take a pen and paper and write down your worries one by one. Use the 'one step at a time' process on page 4. When time is up, say 'STOP' to yourself and go somewhere else and do something different. You might even want to do something nice, to reward yourself for such hard worry work. Some people find they're unable to worry to order, so the worry time might end up being trouble free!

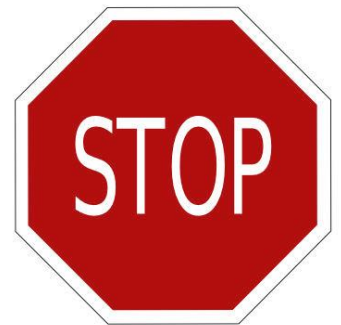
## Share your worries

Worries don't live long outside our heads. Talking about a worry can help us to see the bigger picture and can help us find solutions or make helpful plans. Meet a friend or relative and tell them what's on your mind. We all worry, so you can be sure they'll have things they worry about too.

## Thought stopping

When you become aware of some worry or other distressing thought, or find yourself dwelling on something upsetting, simply say 'STOP.'

You can say this out loud, or perhaps better, say it to yourself inside your head. You may have to shout it out - imagine yourself shouting 'STOP!' at the top of your voice inside your head. Imagine yourself screaming 'STOP' if you have to!



Sometimes that is enough to jolt you out of a thought pattern that otherwise might go on to become a habit. The problem with working to stop our thoughts by, for example, saying to oneself '*I mustn't worry about X*' is that our deliberate attempts to suppress our thoughts often have the opposite effect.

## 'Box' your worries

Imagine your worry as an object, something you can pick up and move. Imagine this object in as much detail as you can. Perhaps you could imagine your worry as a certain shape, with a certain colour. Imagine yourself pulling out the worry from your mind, and placing it into an imaginary box.

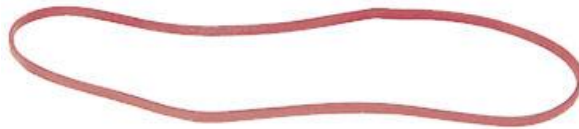


You might want to imagine a cardboard box, or perhaps you would want to imagine something stronger.

If you think the worry needs locking away, perhaps you could imagine a safe, or some sort of locked box where you can put the worry away safely under lock and key.

When the worry is safely boxed away, you might want to imagine moving the box somewhere so it's no longer in your mind. Perhaps imagine taking it outside, throwing it into the sea or dropping it down a well.

### A bit of a pain!



This one sometimes helps, but we probably shouldn't overdo it. Sometimes we need a sharp stimulus to lift us out of a thinking rut. Some people find that wearing an elastic band around their wrist and giving it a sharp 'twang' when they realise they're worrying gives them enough of a shock to start them on a different thinking path. Ouch! Maybe there are other ways that might work for you that needn't sting so much...

### 'Just worrying'

The 'just worrying' technique simply involves you labelling worry (giving it a name and describing it) as 'just worrying' and then bringing your attention back to your breath, or simply changing the subject of your thinking. It helps prevent worry becoming a kind of vicious circle.

Each time you catch yourself worrying, just label it again and change the subject.

It doesn't matter if you do it 10 times a minute or if you only realise you've been worrying after a couple of hours and then use the technique. The important thing is that you use the technique when you realise that you're worrying. You'll probably find this quite hard at first - be kind to yourself, don't blame yourself for being human.

It's important you don't change the label from 'just worrying' to 'don't worry', as telling yourself not to worry is rarely helpful. This one takes practice. You'll forget to do this many times. When you remember, just forgive yourself and, gently and kindly, label the worry as 'just worrying' and move your attention elsewhere. Like exercise, it becomes much easier with practice.

## Grounding 5-4-3-2-1

This technique uses our five senses to draw our attention outwards, away from our worries and towards the world around us. When we pay attention to our worries they may become stronger. When our attention is elsewhere, we drain our worrying thoughts of energy.

Before starting, pay attention to your breathing. Slow, deep, long breaths can help you maintain a sense of calm. Once you're breathing slowly and deeply, go through the following steps to help ground yourself. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds or the texture of an ordinary object:



Acknowledge **FIVE** things you see around you. It could be a light switch, a spot on the ceiling, any five things at all in your surroundings.



Acknowledge **FOUR** things you can feel around you. It could be your hair, your clothes, a pillow, a desk, or the ground under your feet.



Acknowledge **THREE** things you can hear. This could be any external sound. Focus on things you can hear outside of your body.



Acknowledge **TWO** things you can smell. Maybe you're in your office and can smell coffee or furniture polish. If you're outside, notice any scents from nature in the air.



Acknowledge **ONE** thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like - toothpaste, coffee, gum, perhaps the food you ate for lunch?

After you've done this, take a slow deep breath and carry on with your day. How easy this is, and how much benefits you derive from it, increases with practice.

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## Conclusion

We hope this has been helpful. Remember the above might seem simple, but 'simple' is not the same as 'easy'. Changing our thoughts takes practice. In the current climate it can be hard to stop worrying, but the effort is worth it!

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