How to stop worrying. Ask yourself if the problem is solvable

Research shows that while you are worrying, you temporarily feel less anxious. Running over the problem in your head distracts you from your emotions and makes you feel like you are getting something accomplished. But worrying and problem solving are two very different things.

Problem solving involves evaluating a situation, coming up with concrete steps for dealing with it, and then putting the plan into action. Worrying, on the other hand, rarely leads to solutions. No matter how much time you spend dwelling on worst-case scenarios, you are no more prepared to deal with them should they actually happen.

**Distinguish between solvable and unsolvable worries**

If a worry pops into your head, start by asking yourself whether the problem is something you can actually solve. The following questions can help:

- Is the problem something you are currently facing, rather than an imaginary what-if?
- If the problem is an imaginary what-if, how likely is it to happen? Is your concern realistic?
- Can you do something about the problem or prepare for it, or is it out of your control?

Productive, solvable worries are those you can take action on right away. For example, if you are worried about your bills, you could call your creditors to see about flexible payment options. Unproductive, unsolvable worries are those for which there is no corresponding action. “What if I get cancer someday?” or “What if my kid gets into an accident?”

If the worry is solvable, start brainstorming. Make a list of all the possible solutions you can think of. Try not to get too hung up on finding the perfect solution. Focus on the things you have the power to change, rather than the circumstances or realities beyond your control. After you have evaluated your options, make a plan of action. Once you have a plan and start doing something about the problem, you will feel much less worried.
Dealing with unsolvable worries

But what if the worry is not something you can solve? If you are a chronic worrier, the vast majority of your anxious thoughts probably fall in this camp. In such cases, it is important to tune into your emotions.

Worrying helps you avoid unpleasant emotions. Worrying keeps you in your head, thinking about how to solve problems rather than allowing yourself to feel the underlying emotions. But you can not worry your emotions away. While you are worrying, your feelings are temporarily suppressed, but as soon as you stop, the tension, the stress and the anxiety bounces back. And then, you start worrying about your feelings, “What is wrong with me? I should not feel this way!”

The only way out of this vicious cycle is by learning to embrace your feelings. This may seem scary at first because of negative beliefs you have about emotions. For example, you may believe that you should always be rational and in control, that your feelings should always make sense, or that you should not feel certain emotions, such as fear or anger.

The truth is that emotions—like life—are messy. They do not always make sense and they are not always pleasant. But as long as you can accept your feelings as part of being human, you will be able to experience them without becoming overwhelmed and learn how to use them to your advantage.