

Worry Management Time

Some people with anxiety find themselves having a lot of uncontrollable worries. This may include dwelling on possible worst-case outcomes and an inability to set aside or let go of a worry. Worries can usually be put into one of three categories: (1) Not important, (2) Important and can be solved (practical worries), and (3) Important but either do not exist or cannot be solved (potential worries). Most people with anxiety have a lot of these third types of thoughts, usually starting with “What if...?”. For example, potential worries may include, “What if I miss the deadline?”; “What if I get ill and cannot take care of my family?”; “What if I say the wrong thing?”; “What if something happens to my loved one?”; “What if I show up to this event and no one wants to talk to me?” and so forth. Uncertainty is part of our everyday lives, and for people with anxiety, worry about such uncertainty can start to feel out of control.

In these situations, some people may believe that worrying about potential problems in the future helps them generate solutions in case these “What if...” situations do arise. Worry behaviors include making plans, overpreparing, and seeking reassurance to try to increase your certainty around future events. Over time, these worry behaviors become stronger and stronger. They often get in the way of other goals and valued activities you have. Learning to live with uncertainty is an important part of stopping these behaviors from taking control of your life.

Worry Management Time is an approach that can help by helping you learn to cope with uncertainty and neutralize the power of your worries. The process is as follows:

1. Schedule a specific time to dedicate to worrying each day, for about 20-30 minutes.
2. During the day, write down your worries and try to refocus on the present. Save your worries for your scheduled time.

Having a regularly scheduled time for Worry Management can help you stop your worries about potential problems from getting in the way of the rest of your day. It can also help to make sure:

- You’re in a quiet place where others won’t disturb you.
- You won’t be distracted (for example, turn your phone off or leave it in the other room).
- You don’t schedule your worry management time too close to bedtime.

You should expect to feel mildly-to-moderately anxious during this Worry Management Time. In fact, that is the whole point—rather than avoiding the anxiety, notice the anxiety and continue with your scheduled Worry Management. If you don’t feel anxious during this time, try to focus on your common fears and the “worst case scenario” of your “What if...” worries. You can either think about these in your mind, or actually write it out. For example, you could write a description of your worst-case scenario for 2-3 minutes. The idea is to confront the worst fear that underlies many of your potential “What if...” worries.

We want you to feel mildly-to-moderately anxious during this activity (for example, a rating of 4-to-6 on a scale from 0 = *no anxiety* to 10 = *highest possible anxiety*). Through repetition, the experience will get easier, and your anxiety will lessen as you learn that you can cope with these thoughts and feelings and tolerate uncertainty.

List of Worries Worksheet: Instructions

Throughout the week, keep track of your worries as they occur. Write them down but try not to spend time thinking about them – that is for your scheduled worry management time.

Consider keeping this form or a similar list for tracking (notepad, phone app) near you all day, including when you’re in bed, so you can write your worries down as soon as you have them. Then, **try to let the worry go**. Easier said than done, of course, but recall you will be working through these at your scheduled worry management time.

Use the worksheet on the following page to track your worries. Be specific, including the following:

- What is the **situation** you are worried about? For example: “*A deadline at work*”; “*My partner traveling long distances for work*”.
- What **thoughts** are you having? What is going through your mind? For example, “*What if I don’t do a good enough job?*”, “*What if I don’t make the deadline*”, “*What if my partner has an accident on the way to work?*”
- What **type of worry** is this? Is this (1) Not important, (2) Important and can be solved (practical worries), and (3) Important but either does not exist or cannot be solved (potential worries).
- What do you **fear** might happen? What would be the **consequence**? For example: “*I’ll get fired*” or “*My partner might die*”.
- What **emotions** are you feeling? For example: ‘*Anxious*’, ‘*Fearful*’, ‘*Overwhelmed*’, or ‘*Sad*’.

Example:

Date & time	Situation	What are you thinking?	What type of worry is this?	What do you fear might happen?	What emotions are you feeling?
Mon @ 3:30am	Lying in bed (woke up from sleep)	What if something happens to my children?	Potential	My children might get hurt, get into an accident, or die.	Frightened, overwhelmed, sad
Mon @ 8:45am	On the bus to work	I forgot to send out an agenda for a 10:30am meeting.	Important and can be solved	My coworkers will think I’m unprepared.	Tense
Mon @ 11:30am	Getting ready for a meeting	What if daycare calls and has to send my child home sick?	Potential	I won’t be able to get my work done.	Overwhelmed
Mon @ 1:00pm	Working on a 4:00pm deadline	What if I don’t make this deadline?	Important and can be solved	My boss will be upset.	Overwhelmed, tense
Mon @ 5:30pm	On the bus home	What if I don’t have time to pick up milk?	Not important		
Mon @ 10:30pm	Lying in bed	What if we have an earthquake like I saw in the news?	Potential	We’d lose our home; we’d suffer; people will suffer.	Hopeless, sad

What do I do during worry management time?

For the first one or two times you practice your worry management, review your “List of Worries” worksheet, and focus on sorting your worries into the three categories discussed above:

1. Not important,
2. Important and can be solved (*practical worries*), or
3. Important but either does not exist or cannot be solved (*potential worries*)

This skill and awareness are key to learning to identify your potential worries and distinguish them from worries you can solve. It is the first step towards focusing on managing the anxiety and control of your “potential” worries (“What if...”) and eventually learning to tolerate uncertainty.

Once you are aware of your different types of worries, the focus of worry management time every day will be on these potential worries—including what you fear, how you feel when you think about it, and what you think.

How do I focus on my potential worries during this time?

When you sit down for your scheduled worry management time, review your Worry List worksheet, and focus on your potential worries. Remember, you should expect to feel mildly-to-moderately anxious during this Worry Management Time (for example, a rating of 4-to-6 on a scale from 0 = *no anxiety* to 10 = *highest possible anxiety*). If you don’t feel anxious during this time, try to focus on your common fears and the “worst case scenario” of your “What if...” worries. You can write out a description of your “worst case scenario” for a few minutes. Over time, this helps you:

1. Learn that you can cope with the thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations of anxiety.
2. Understand and confront the worst fears underlying many of your potential “What if...” worries—which may help lessen the intensity of these thoughts and the control they have over you and your life.
3. Learn to tolerate the uncertainty of life.

Through repetition, the experience will get easier. You will learn to lessen the control that anxiety has over your day. The intensity and interference of your anxiety will lessen as you learn that you can cope with these thoughts and feelings and tolerate uncertainty.

Worry Management Time Worksheet

Notes from Worry Management Time

Feel free to write whatever you would like here as you review your List of Worries worksheet during your scheduled worry time. This may include reflections on common themes in your worries or writing about your feared “worst case” scenarios and outcomes.

Reflection at the End of Worry Management Time

- 1. How did it go?
- 2. How long did you spend? Was it more or less time than scheduled?
- 3. What was your highest anxiety rating?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>No anxiety</i>					<i>Moderately anxious</i>					<i>Highest possible anxiety</i>

- 4. Did some of your worries have practical solutions? (see “Solving Practical Worries” worksheet)
- 5. Did you notice you have fewer worries than you realized? Or perhaps a lot of your worries were about the same thing?
- 6. Did some of the worries no longer bother you?

Now, stop your focus on worries and shift your attention to the present by engaging in one of your valued activities (page 6).

Steps to Refocus on the Present

It can be difficult to stop focusing on your worries. In order to refocus on the present after either (1) writing down worries on your List of Worries worksheet during the day, or (2) completing your scheduled Worry Management Time, it may help to reengage in a task that is absorbing, pleasant, or meaningful to you.

Important Areas of Your Life

First, try to think about five or so areas of your life that are really important to you right now—these may be things that you really value or are meaningful. Everyone is different, although common areas are family and relationships (friends, romantic partnerships); work, school, and other roles and responsibilities; health; spirituality or religion; finances; community (volunteering, advocacy); and leisure activities and hobbies.

List the most important and values things in your life right now:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Engaging with Valued Activities

Now, based on these important and valuable areas of your life, generate a list of possible activities that would be relatively easy to do when you’re done with Worry Management Time or as a way to refocus on the present when you find yourself worrying.

Note: Some people find physical activities, like taking a brief walk, a nice way to clear their head. Others may prefer something more social, like a phone call with a friend. Develop your list based on your valued life areas above.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Remember to refer back to this list if you need a reminder of activities to engage in after your Worry Management Time or whenever you find yourself needing to refocus your attention away from worry!

Other tips for refocusing on the present:

- Tell yourself that this is not the time to deal with your worries—remind yourself that you have Worry Management Time scheduled.
- Try a “grounding” or “coping” technique, such as the “5-4-3-2-1” technique:
 - Notice **FIVE** things you see around you.



- This can be objects in front of you or anything in your surroundings.
- Notice **FOUR** things you can touch around you.
 - This can be your clothing, what you're sitting on, or the ground under your feet.
- Notice **THREE** things you can hear.
 - This can be any external sound, including sounds in the distance.
- Notice **TWO** things you can smell.
 - You can use this as an excuse to find a scent, like soap or lotion.
- Notice **ONE** thing you can taste.
 - What does the inside of your mouth taste like? Coffee, lunch, gum?

EXTRA WORKSHEETS

Worksheet: List of Worries

Date & time	Situation	What are you thinking?	What type of worry is this?	What do you fear might happen?	What emotions are you feeling?

Worry Management Time Worksheet

Notes from Worry Management Time

Feel free to write whatever you would like here as you review your List of Worries worksheet during your scheduled worry time. This may include reflections on common themes in your worries or writing about your feared “worst case” scenarios and outcomes.

Reflection at the End of Worry Management Time

1. How did it go?
2. How long did you spend? Was it more or less time than scheduled?
3. What was your highest anxiety rating?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>No anxiety</i>					<i>Moderately anxious</i>					<i>Highest possible anxiety</i>

4. Did some of your worries have practical solutions? (see “Solving Practical Worries” worksheet)
5. Did you notice you have fewer worries than you realized? Or perhaps a lot of your worries were about the same thing?
6. Did some of the worries no longer bother you?

Now, stop your focus on worries and shift your attention to the present by engaging in one of your valued activities (page 6).