



Stress Less: 16 Worry Cures

(RealSimple.com) - Do you agonize too much? Simple ways to spot the signs and find better ways to handle life's most common stressors

Problem: You worry about job security.

The reality: In an uncertain economy, employment is far from a sure thing, so it's easy to wonder if your position may one day be eliminated.

You're most vulnerable if: You've been laid off from a job before or someone close to you was fired unexpectedly.

What to do: Grounding yourself in day-to-day reality is a good way to avoid stressing. Try to keep a close eye on how your company is doing financially so you can gauge the likelihood of layoffs, says organizational psychologist Barbara Gutek. Meet with your boss to learn what you can do to solidify your position with the company. Topics to discuss include what projects you should be working on and which skills and responsibilities you should be developing.

No matter what, it's always smart to look ahead, whether that means thinking of your next move within your company or contemplating a larger career change, says psychologist Robert Leahy.

It has gone too far when: You are constantly stressing over your job performance, despite multiple reassurances that your work is up to snuff. In this case, overly perfectionistic tendencies could be to blame, and you may want to discuss this issue with a therapist.

Problem: You're nervous about the safety and well-being of your children.

The reality: There's plenty to be anxious about. Because you love your children deeply, it's natural that you want to protect them from harm and heartache, and it can be hard to accept that you can't completely control whether they get sick, do well in school, or make friends easily. In fact, "some worry or concern is probably a sign of good parenting," says psychologist Steven Taylor.

You're most vulnerable if: Your child had a serious illness or accident or had to be hospitalized early in life, or he or she has a chronic health condition. Or if you were neglected during your childhood, you could be overcompensating today by constantly worrying about how your kids are doing.

What to do: Find a pediatrician you trust and respect and can talk to candidly. "Most pediatricians are used to parents who worry," says psychologist Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, "and a big part of their job is to help parents figure out what's worth worrying about and what isn't." If your pediatrician doesn't do this, it may be time to switch doctors.

With worries that aren't related to health - if your child is struggling with math or having a conflict with a friend, for example - ask yourself whether there's a specific action you can take to deal with the situation. Does your child need a tutor? Could talking to a therapist help him better manage difficult friendships? If a solution presents itself, try it.

But in the end, psychologist Robert Leahy says, "you may have to learn to accept uncertainty and your limitations in controlling things. It helps if you recognize that kids are resilient. They have to learn how to fall down to learn how to get up."

It has gone too far when: Worrying about your children interferes with your own life - if you're losing sleep, for instance, or if constant micromanaging is hurting your relationship with your child.

"If your body feels tight all the time and you can't concentrate on work, tell your doctor that worry over your child is interfering with your ability to get through a normal day," says Nolen-Hoeksema. Ask about the possibility of seeing an anxiety expert.

Problem: You frequently think about the threat of terrorism and the possibility of natural disasters.

The reality: We live in an uncertain world and are constantly exposed to violent images on TV and the Internet. It's enough to make even the calmest person paranoid, or at least a bit edgy.

You're most vulnerable if: You've ever been in a situation that threatened your safety - surviving a powerful earthquake or a four-alarm fire, for example - says psychotherapist Jerilyn Ross. Also, you may be someone who simply doesn't cope well with unpredictability.

What to do: Take a few moments to consider the probability (not the possibility) that a terrorist attack will occur in your town, a hurricane will destroy your home, or whatever else you're worried about happening will happen, says Ross. "If you differentiate between facts and fears, you can deal with reality," she says.

Even if you live in New York City or Washington, D.C., which bore the brunt of the 9/11 attacks, remind yourself that that is the only time in U.S. history that such a large-scale terrorist attack has occurred. "Our minds have a way of focusing on the horrific risks that are highlighted in the news," says Ross. "However, the chances of being in a car accident are greater than those of being killed by a terrorist."

As a way of coping without blowing things out of proportion, learn how to be better prepared for a disaster. Write a list of things that would make your home safer and more secure, and come up with a disaster-readiness plan for your family: Where will you meet? Who will be your contact person if you're separated? What kind of supplies can you stock up on now? Check these tasks off the list as you complete them.

"Then you can say, 'OK, I've done everything I can. Now I need to go on with my life,'" says Ross. "If you can't move on, seek help."

It has gone too far when: Your worry leads you to make unnecessary and unreasonable adjustments to your life - for example, refusing to fly or take public transportation. These fears may have developed into a mild anxiety disorder, says Ross. Talking to a therapist could bring things back into perspective and help you live normally.