

Script – Print – Wired for worry

The clock ticks past midnight. Your eyes are open, your body still – but your mind is anything but quiet. From bills to health scares to family stress, worry shows up, unpacks, and overstays its welcome.

When it comes to worry, there's no shortage of things that keep us up at night – some of it probably has us tossing and turning at times.

According to experts like Ashley Pratt, a psychotherapist with OSF HealthCare, most of what we fret about never comes to fruition. But that doesn't stop us from experiencing a few anxious moments.

But why do we worry?

"It's actually part of our human nature," says Pratt. "Our brain is designed to help us protect ourselves from danger or unpleasant experiences. So, worry is kind of our brain's way of helping us navigate or prepare for those things."

But some worrying can serve a purpose, Pratt says. For example, if you're worried about skin cancer, you might be more diligent when it comes to protecting your skin. If you're worried about money, you might become thrifter when it comes to spending.

Pratt says the best way to get a hold of worry is to concentrate on what you can control.

"Focus on what we have power over," Pratt says. "That's one of my favorite ways to manage worry. That way we can start to incorporate other coping skills through our life, whether it's breathing exercises or talking to friends, listening to podcasts, doing enjoyable hobbies throughout our week."

Still, life happens and that means some things we worry about do come true. Pratt recommends meeting those fears head on.

"I think we can learn that we can get through it, first and foremost," she emphasizes. "Even if our worries do come true occasionally, we can cope with it. Worry gives us opportunities to learn about how we handle those situations."

Instead of worrying, Pratt says to trust yourself **IF** something negative does happen. It's better to remain calm than distressed when trying to solve a potential problem.

But if you are having a tough time navigating those worries, there are ways you can calm your nerves. For example, stay off your phone, where you can find news that may be upsetting. Check in with people in your inner circle that you trust and can talk to. Finally, Pratt suggests starting the practice of gratitude.

"It helps rewire those negative thoughts and give us more focus on the things that are going well in our lives," Pratt says.

Trying to worry less takes time and lots of work. If you can't seem to find any relief on your own, Pratt recommends seeking professional help.

"If it feels unmanageable, reaching out to someone, whether your doctor for medication management, going to therapy, learning different techniques and just finding something that works."

Ways to worry less

Robert Leahy is a psychologist and author of the book "The Worry Cure." He offers the following tips to cope with worry.

1. Identify productive and unproductive worry

Determining whether worry will help you find solutions to a problem. If yes, write a to-do list with steps to help solve the problem.

2. Track your worries

Write down your unproductive worries throughout the day and dedicate time to thinking about them.

3. Accept uncertainty

Leahy says repeating a worry for 20 minutes ("I may never fall asleep" or "I could lose my job") lessens its power.

4. Be mindful

Leahy says there are ways to be mindful throughout the day. Work on living in the now by practicing deep breathing. Let your body relax to release the tension.

5. Reframe your worry

Leahy says reframing how you handle disappointments can help worry. Ask yourself what you have learned from your bad experiences. Make a list of things that make you grateful.

6. Put worries in perspective

Learn from previous worries. If you can't remember what they were, it might mean they never came true, or you were able to deal with them and move on.