

HEALTH AND FITNESS

Finding the balance in uncertain times

Mark Shields explains

Everyday the media reminds us how difficult and challenging the world has become and the term “credit crunch” is the most popular and repeated term of the day. Yet wherever we look there appears to be problems that extend far beyond the current economic crisis and failing strategies of millennium politics.

The impact on us as human beings is not only affecting us consciously but the hidden unconscious is also taking its toll on us and it is this inner talk that will be the most detrimental to our mental health.

Let's begin by looking at the two most common problems being experienced in such uncertain times and examine the differences between them. Firstly worry and then anxiety. Worry is what you think about often late into the night and prevents you from sleeping, whilst anxiety is the feelings you get as a result of this worry.

Although both of these feelings are feared they can also be of use to us by stopping us in our tracks and making us look at what is happening to us more seriously and help us take precise and evasive action if required. A short sharp shock can benefit one to make changes to their life and reap the appropriate rewards.



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So although both have their upsides they also have their downsides if they get out of control. Worry creates internal dialogue, a repeating story we tell ourselves over and over again. These stories create our feelings and subsequent anxiety. Worrying always follows the same pattern, what we worry about, how the worry starts and how we subsequently change our state and stop worrying.

Some people worry more than others. We can all think of someone immediately that seems to worry all the time.

The first place to start on the journey of stopping worrying is understanding your own worry pattern. Ask yourself the following three questions.

How did you learn to worry? Who taught you how to worry When did you start the worrying habit?

When you look at worrying in this way often people realise their worrying is simply a habit, a strategy, a way to react in certain circumstances. Once this is understood and acknowledged different strategies and problem solving solutions can be adopted to replace the old behaviour or habit of worrying.

Anxiety is a very intense experience and can be different in some way for all who experience it. The range and severity of symptoms is vast ranging from mild unease to full blown terror and panic attacks.

I always investigate thoroughly with each client in how they do feel anxiety. How they experience their symptoms and the effects their anxiety has on their normal everyday functioning.

Physical symptoms vary immensely too, from sweaty palms and a racing heart to severe butterflies and a difficulty in breathing.

It is important to understand how the anxiety manifests in each individual as the cure will need to match the cause, and there are as many cures as there are causes.

It is also important to recognise the signs of anxiety early as symptoms can get worse over time if not addressed properly.

I feel it important to ask all my clients to assess their anxiety using three parameters.

Intensity | Frequency | Duration

The intensity is measured on what I call the "scale of discomfort". This is simply a measure on a scale between 1 and 10 (10 most severe) depending on the severity of their symptoms. I ask all my clients to rate their feelings daily and note them in a diary. This way we can observe patterns, the triggers and trends and begin to take control of the anxiety.

With frequency I ask them to note in their diary and record how often and when they are experiencing the anxiety and with duration how long the anxiety lasts from minutes to hours to days.

Feelings of severe anxiety can be overwhelming and often people feel out of control. The first step is always to look at changing your behaviour in a more positive way, no matter how small it may seem as this is the first step in taking back control and reducing feelings of being out of control or overwhelmed.

Small changes can make a huge difference and here a just a few effective methods in help overcome anxiety.

Stop obsessing and worrying about how you feel. A thought can only last for a maximum of 5 seconds. If necessary simply stop everything you are doing and shout "stop" to yourself, imagining a bright red stop sign as you do.

Do a reality check. Ask yourself "how clear am I on what I am actually afraid of?" Quantify the reality of the fear as often with worry and anxiety thoughts become irrational and problems seem bigger than they are. Write down the problem and commit to some written goals and

actions of how you are going to approach the situation rationally.

Negative thinking and worrying can spiral your feelings downwards. Reframe your negative thoughts and find some new ways to think about your problems. If you have been made redundant for example, look at your achievements, your successes and what you have learnt from the experience and how you might do things differently.

Focus on the needs of others to keep your mind from obsessing about your own worries and fears. Try to put things into perspective by comparing yourself to others less fortunate.

Engage in regular mental relaxation exercises such as meditation, or yoga. It is great for the mind and gets you interacting and mixing with others whilst having fun at the same time. Deep breathing exercises can release pressure within your body, relaxing muscles and releasing stress within the body.

Engage in some form of physical exercise at least three times a week. Endorphins from exercise directly combat stress hormones created by anxiety and worry.

Worry and anxiety can pass with time and by organising your thoughts surrounding your issue you will see a clearer picture of how you can approach the problem and ultimately find a solution.

Sometimes we need our lives to be completely shaken before we can even begin to face the challenges that have always been there, but have been ignored. The key is in knowing how to focus inward into the fear rather than run from it, in doing so you can come out the other side with a deeper understanding and acceptance of yourself and others.

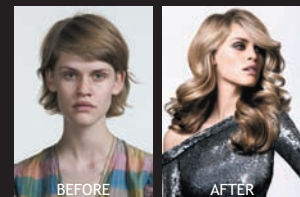
Mark Shields is a Behavioural Change Coach and Author. For any questions on the article or advice on stress or anxiety you can contact Mark direct. Marks new Audio books Stop Stress and Stop Panic Attacks will soon be joining other Home Hypnotherapy audios currently found at Waterstones and other leading retail outlets.

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