



## UICS NEWS

The year 2014 is rapidly coming to an end and as one year closes it is our nature to start thinking ahead to the next year. The New Year is often approached with eagerness and enthusiasm. Many people make promises for change and improvement through resolutions. But sometimes this forward thinking triggers thoughts of worry and doubt. "How am I going to pay off the Christmas spending on my credit card?" "What if I fail to stick to my New Year's resolution?" If you find yourself troubled by worry, not just at this time of the year, but at any time, we encourage you to practice the skills and tips offered in this newsletter. And, remember, our counsellors are always here to assist with any personal problem, including managing worrisome thinking and goal-setting.

It has been a busy and rewarding year for us here at UICS. We offered many hours of counselling for hundreds of employees and their family members in our three offices, either in person, via telephone, or e-counselling. We also conducted several worksite presentations on topics, such as work-life balance, post-traumatic stress, and substance abuse in the workplace, plus assisted member companies with a critical incident and emergency employee issues.

We send good wishes to all for a peaceful holiday season and New Year. May the year 2015 find you healthy and balanced, and resilient in facing any challenges to come.

*The UICS Staff*

"Worry is a misuse of the imagination." Dan Zadra



## How to Stop Worrying

Worrying can be helpful when it spurs you to take action and solve a problem. But if you're preoccupied with "what ifs" and worst-case scenarios, worry becomes a problem. Unrelenting doubts and fears can sap your emotional energy, send your anxiety levels soaring, and interfere with your daily life. Chronic worrying is a mental habit that can be broken. You can train your brain to stay calm and look at life from a more positive perspective. Following are some tips to help you regain control of your worried mind.

### Tip #1: Create a worry period

Telling yourself to stop worrying doesn't work—at least not for long. Rather than trying to stop or get rid of an anxious thought, give yourself permission to have it, but put off thinking about it until later. Choose a set time and place for worrying. It should be the same every day (e.g. in the living room from 5:00 to 5:20 p.m.) and early enough that it won't make you anxious right before bedtime. During your worry period, you're allowed to worry about whatever's on your mind. The rest of the day, however, is a worry-free zone. If an anxious thought or worry comes into your head during the day, make a brief note of it on paper and postpone it to your worry period. During the worry period reflect on the worries you wrote down during the day. If the thoughts are still bothering you, allow yourself to worry about them, but only for the amount of time you've specified for your worry period. Postponing worrying is effective because it breaks the habit of dwelling on worries in the present moment. There's no struggle to suppress the thought or judge it, you simply save it for later.

### Tip #2: Ask yourself if the problem is solvable

Worrying and problem solving are two 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 rarely leads to solutions. No matter how much time you spend dwelling on worst-case scenarios, you're no more prepared to deal with them should they actually happen. If a worry pops into your head, start by asking yourself; 1) Is the problem something you're currently facing, rather than an imaginary what-if? 2) If the problem is an imaginary what-if, how likely is it to happen? 3) Can you do something about the problem or prepare for it, or is it out of your control? If the worry is solvable, start brainstorming. Once you have a plan and start doing something about the problem, you'll feel much less worried.

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"If a problem is fixable, if a situation is such that you can do something about it, then there is no need to worry. If it's not fixable, then there is no help in worrying. There is no benefit in worrying whatsoever."  
— Dalai Lama XIV

Worry continued

### Tip #3: Accept uncertainty

The inability to tolerate uncertainty plays a huge role in anxiety and worry. Thinking about all the things that could go wrong won't keep bad things from happening. It will only keep you from enjoying the good things you have in the present. A key is to come to an understanding of the disadvantages and problems of being intolerant of uncertainty.

### Tip #4: Challenge anxious thoughts

If you suffer from chronic anxiety and worries, chances are you look at the world in ways that make it seem more dangerous than it really is. You may also discredit your own ability to handle life's problems. These irrational, pessimistic attitudes are known as cognitive distortions and although they are not based on reality, they are not easy to give up. They may be part of a lifelong pattern of thinking that's become so automatic you're not even completely aware of it. In order to break these thinking habits and stop the worry and anxiety they bring, you must retrain your brain.

Start by identifying the anxious thought, being as detailed as possible about what worries you. Question the worried thought; "What's the evidence that this is true?"; "Is there a more positive, realistic way of looking at the situation?"; "How will worrying about it help me and how will it hurt me?" As you examine and challenge your worries and fears, you'll develop a more balanced perspective.

### Tip # 5: Be aware of how others affect you

How you feel is affected by the company you keep, whether you're aware of it or not. Studies show that emotions are contagious. We quickly "catch" moods from other people. Spend less time with people who make you anxious. Choose your confidantes carefully. Know who to talk to about situations that make you anxious. Some people will help you gain perspective, while others will feed into your worries, doubts, and fears.

### Tip #6: Practice mindfulness

Worrying is usually focused on the future—on what might happen and what you'll do about it. The centuries-old practice of mindfulness can help you break free of your worries by bringing your attention back to the present. Pay attention to the way your body feels, the rhythm of your breathing, your ever-changing emotions, and the thoughts that drift across your mind. If you find yourself getting stuck on a particular thought, bring your attention back to the present moment.

Using mindfulness meditation to stay focused on the present is a simple concept, but it takes practice to reap the benefits. At first, you'll probably find that your mind keeps wandering back to your worries. Try not to get frustrated. Each time you draw your focus back to the present, you're reinforcing a new mental habit that will help you break free of the negative worry cycle.

Sources: helpguide.org

*The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You* by Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D



Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face. Victor Hugo



## Couple's Corner

Here are some secrets to a successful marriage shared by couples making love last for the long haul:

- "Good relationships don't just happen. They take time, patience, and two people who truly want to be together."
- "We're best friends. You really have to like each other to last."
- "We made a pact to never fight about money."
- "Never discuss sensitive subjects when hungry or tired. Talk. Communication is more about listening than talking."
- "Always find things to laugh about."
- "Remember: Women want to be loved and cherished. Men want to feel respected....even more than they want to feel loved."
- "Keep a date night. Since we married, we've maintained one night a month to go out as a couple."
- "Put your relationship first. Be open and flexible to change. Adapt."
- "Never go to sleep on an argument."
- "It's about give and take and trust."
- "If you're in it for life, you're both going to do a lot of growing up and maturing over the years—you have to stay intimately in touch with each other's growth over all this time or you end up not knowing the person you're married to as he/she changes over the years."

## Winter Exercising

Motivating yourself for exercise in winter can be difficult when the days are short and the weather is chilly. However, exercising indoors or outdoors can be hugely beneficial to improving your health and fitness during the winter months.

**Beat the winter blues:** Whether it's the usual winter blues or the more serious SAD (seasonal affective disorder), a daily workout releases de-stress brain chemicals, giving you a break from the daily grind and helping to ease depression. After 10 minutes of exercise, the brain releases the chemicals serotonin and dopamine, which can help to reduce anxiety and depression while boosting wellbeing. Heating your body temperature up with a workout has a soothing, calming effect on your body, not unlike a long soak in a warm bath or lying in front of the heater.

There are a limited number of foods that can provide your body with vitamin D, the easiest source is from exposure to sunlight. Your body needs Vitamin D for strong bones and to keep your immune system strong. Research has also found that vitamin D can help prevent high blood pressure, diabetes and cancer.

**Avoid winter weight gain:** You may find it harder to resist temptations during the colder months and holiday seasons. Exercising will help you manage your weight better and keep your body in shape. A daily 20-30 minute walk would be an ideal way to start – it would fit nicely into your lunch hour too!  
*Source: body and soul.com*