

Excessive worry: learning to cope

Today's world is fast-paced and complex. Many situations can cause feelings of worry, uncertainty and fear. Often these uncomfortable feelings subside when the situation changes or when you learn to cope with the situation. Sometimes, though, these feelings do not subside. Instead, they get more intense and become difficult to control.

Feelings of excessive worrying and constant anxiety that are left unchecked, may lead to serious health problems.

When does worrying become a problem?

Answering the following questions may help you determine if you have a potential problem with worrying:

- Does it feel like you worry all the time?
- Does excessive worry interfere with your work, family and social life?
- Has excessive worry caused you to avoid situations, lose confidence or feel depressed and guilty?

What are some signs of excessive worry?

The following feelings, thoughts and behaviors may represent excessive worry:


- Extreme feelings of fearfulness and dread
- Inability to stop worrying even with significant effort
- Trouble concentrating or thinking
- Restlessness or feeling “on-edge”

- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Sleep problems
- Trembling
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pains
- Nausea or other stomach problems
- Dizziness

Challenging excessive worry

Once you identify excessive worry, the next step is to explore whether the thoughts are rational and realistic. To do this, consider the following questions:

- Is this thought or perception accurate?
- Am I jumping to conclusions, over-generalizing or over-emphasizing an aspect of the situation?
- In the big scheme of things, is this issue really important?
- Is there any *real* danger in the situation that caused this fearful reaction?

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- If this thought results in increased anger, anxiety, worry or fear, then why think about it?
 - Is there any benefit to having this thought?

Changing excessive worry

The final step is changing or redirecting thoughts to be more realistic and productive. While it is difficult and sometimes impossible to change situations that cause discomfort, it is possible to change your reactions to the situations. An example would be to turn this negative thought into a positive one: “I know I’m not going to pass this exam.” You might, instead, focus on how much you have prepared for the exam and say, “I have studied and planned well for the exam.”

As with learning any new skill, changing unrealistic thought patterns to be more realistic takes time, patience, awareness and practice. Because excessive worry easily becomes automatic and habitual, it may take some time to develop this skill. However, when you are able to recognize, challenge and change unhealthy thoughts to healthy, positive thoughts, you may develop a greater sense of control over your responses to difficult situations and improve the quality of your life.

Getting treatment

It helps to do everything you can to develop new ways to combat worry. However, if worrying has become a regular daily habit and is interfering in your life, you may want to contact your family

doctor, primary care physician (PCP) or a mental health professional who can help you develop ways to cope and suggest resources to help you. When talking with any health care professional, it is important to provide him/her with complete information about your health. Be prepared to discuss:

- All of your emotional symptoms—mood changes, irritability, anger, feelings of losing control, etc.
- All of your physical symptoms—aches and pains, digestive problems, appetite changes, etc.
- Recent changes in your life, whether they are good or bad changes—job change, new baby, death in family, divorce, etc.
- All medications and substances you use—prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements, caffeine and alcohol.
- Your family’s health history.
- How long you’ve been aware of your excessive worry.

Through the help and support of a health care professional, you can successfully learn to manage worry and fear.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.