

## **WORRY – A CYCLE OF INEFFICIENT THOUGHT**

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

Do you worry? Who doesn't? Realistically though, is it worth the time, or is it time wasted? Occasionally worries spur us to action and actually help solve a problem, but, more often, we tend to worry about things we have absolutely no control over - events from our past we can't change, uncertainties of the future, and the feelings and actions of others.

Sadly, when we worry, we focus our thoughts on outcomes we don't like (and usually aren't good for us!). Have you ever heard of worrying that something *good* may happen?

“Worry is a cycle of inefficient thought – whirling about a pivot of fear.” (Author unknown) Think about it. Our thoughts become worrisome and cycle through our minds repeatedly. Why? Are we hoping for a different outcome? This sounds more than a little like the definition of insanity – doing the same thing again and again while expecting different results.

Worry causes dis-stress and all the ill-effects: heightened levels of stress hormones, anxiety, irritability, depression, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, over-eating, inability to eat, racing thoughts, high blood pressure – and the list goes on.

As children, we are indoctrinated by watching adults worry. Worrying tricks our minds into believing we are doing something. If our minds are active, we *feel* active, while in actuality worrying often cripples us into inaction.

The always practical Mark Twain advises us: “Drag your thoughts away from your troubles... by the ears, by the heels, or any other way you can manage it.” In the 1980's Bobby McFerrin's solution was simple, “Don't Worry. Be Happy.” Both philosophies are valid.

Other approaches to alleviate worry are to become aware of negative thoughts. Write them in a journal. Replace them with alternative, helpful perspectives. Identify things that can be done to help. Take action. Focus attention on the positive things in life. Take time out from worries to have fun! Take care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And, talk things over with a friend or counselor.

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