



AnxietyLab.org 3-4-5 Program Course

Method #6

How to stop the worry habit

Worrying is a habit that can be broken with effort. During times of stress when life events make us spend more time looking for solutions to our problems, worrying can overcome us with anxiety and fear. Many people will think through things to prepare for the event or issue, to find possible solutions and to generally 'solve it'. But thinking through an issue is qualitatively different in tone, duration and method from the destructive rumination that often seems like productive attention.

Ruminating (worrying) is thinking about an issue or memory over and over and over again identifying more angles to the perceived problem without ever coming to any solution.

Even the open-minded “*What if?*” thinking style can be distorted into unproductive rumination. Looking for all conceivable dangers of any given situation may seem like the responsible thing to do when in fact you are hurting your own ability to handle the real issue if/when it does actually happen.

Combined with the other anxiety-fighting practices, (daily exposure to beauty, little or no news consumption, and the physical methods to unwind anxiety from your central nervous system), these methods will be highly effective.

Daily steps to take if worrying too much is a problem:

- **Ask: What is it about?** Get to the root cause of what it is that you're worrying about

and figure out steps needed to fix it.

- **Eliminate the trigger.** Journaling and/or speaking about the issue or memory will help find the trigger for the rumination.
- To get a sense of how much you do this, **take a selfie or make a note each time you catch yourself doing it** and then count the times you caught yourself worrying about the same thing. Try to reduce that number.
- **Decide to shift focus; redirect attention towards positive things.** Get a hobby, take a walk, call someone to discuss other things, read a good book or watch a good movie. *Your mind can't ruminate if it's engaged in something else.*
- **Replace rumination with writing a gratitude list** every day. Thinking of more positive things can replace harmful rumination.
- **Re-frame the issue in a better way.** For example: all wedding days have glitches. Laugh at the things that went wrong instead of judging yourself or feeling judged by others. Everyone knows wedding days are notorious for problems. A realistic view of life situations may help end useless worrying.
- **Take responsibility for your choices** of job, friends, living arrangements, etc. If they make you anxious or sick, change them.
- **Help others** (get out of yourself). Shift focus to something positive that is outside yourself. Volunteer with an organization or just go out and do it, (take donations to a charity, clean up something in the neighborhood, send well-wishes to the elderly stuck inside homes, etc...)
- **Use the other skills** to break the rumination habit: daily mindfulness, journaling, exercise.
- **Overcome perfectionism.** The need to have things perfect or always be seen as “perfect” leads to exhaustion and more anxiety. Accept that mistakes and flaws are

human and inevitable and cannot be avoided all the time. Embrace your mistakes, take responsibility and promise to fix what you can. Then move on.

- **Release the need to control everything.** No one can control everything that happens to them.
- For really stubborn memories that you can't over, **consider professional help**. EMDR can be very effective at reducing this problem.