



Worry Time: Giving Your Worries an Appointment

An explainer and worry-time scheduler · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)
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At a glance

- Trying to stop worrying usually backfires. Thought suppression tends to make thoughts return.
- Worry time means postponing worries to a set 15-minute window each day.
- Studies show this simple technique can reduce how much time people spend worrying.

Why worry spreads through the day

When worry is allowed to show up anywhere, it starts to feel like it's everywhere: in the shower, at work, in bed. Your brain learns that any moment is a good moment to worry. Worry time changes that pattern by giving worry a specific time and place, a principle called stimulus control.

How worry time works

1. Choose a 15–20 minute window, at the same time each day. Avoid the hour before bed.
2. When a worry shows up during the day, notice it and write it down briefly.
3. Tell yourself: "Not now. I'll think about this at worry time."
4. Bring your attention back to what you were doing.
5. At worry time, review your list. Worry, problem-solve, or let go of what no longer matters.
6. When the time is up, stop, even if you're not finished.

Many people find that by worry time, some worries no longer seem important. That alone is useful information.

What the research says

In an early study, people who postponed worry to a daily 30-minute period reduced the time they spent worrying during the day (Borkovec, Wilkinson, Folensbee & Lerman, 1983).

A later randomized study found that worry postponement reduced worry and anxiety in people with high levels of worry (McGowan & Behar, 2013).

Tool: My Worry-Time Scheduler

My worry time plan	My answer
My daily worry time (e.g., 5:30–5:45 p.m.):	
Where I'll sit:	
Where I'll jot worries during the day (notebook, phone note):	
What I'll do right after worry time to switch gears:	

Worry list and sort

At worry time, sort each worry into a column.

Can act on soon (plan a step)	Can't control (practise letting go)	No longer matters (cross off)

Strategies to try

- **Be patient.** It may take a week or two for your brain to accept the postponement.
- **Don't argue with worries.** Simply note them and postpone. No need to prove them wrong.
- **Pair with problem-solving.** For worries you can act on, choose one small step during worry time.
- **End with a reset.** After worry time, do something physical or enjoyable to close the window.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Sort practical vs. hypothetical.** Practical worries ("My rent is due") can be solved. Hypothetical worries ("What if I get sick someday?") can't. Problem-solve the first kind; practise letting go of the second.
- **Run uncertainty experiments.** Order a dish you've never tried, take an unplanned route, or send a message without re-reading it. Tolerating small uncertainties builds tolerance for bigger ones.
- **Write the worry story.** With guidance, people sometimes write their feared scenario in detail and re-read it until it loses intensity. This imaginal exposure is used in therapy for chronic worry.
- **Walk your worry time.** Some people find it easier to contain worry time during a walk, with a clear start and end point.

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

What do I believe worrying does for me? Does it actually help?

What topics show up most often on my worry list?

How did my day feel when I postponed my worries?

Which worries disappeared before worry time arrived?

When to reach out for support

If worry feels constant, hard to control, or is affecting your sleep and concentration, talk with a therapist. CBT is very effective for chronic worry.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Borkovec, T. D., Wilkinson, L., Folensbee, R., & Lerman, C. (1983). Stimulus control applications to the treatment of worry. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 21(3), 247–251.

McGowan, S. K., & Behar, E. (2013). A preliminary investigation of stimulus control training for worry: Effects on anxiety and insomnia. *Behavior Modification*, 37(1), 90–112.

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