



25 CREATIVE WAYS TO BREAK THE WORRYING HABIT

1. **Cast a spell.** Harry Potter fans might recall the Riddikulus spell where Harry casts a ridiculous appearance on what he fears most. Imagine what you're fearful of, and make a cartoon out of it; dress it in silly clothing; stretch features out of proportion; or ask what your favorite fictional character would do. Keep thinking of things until you smile or laugh, and the Worry Spell will be broken.
2. **CIA.** Consider the situation you're worried about, and make a three-column list: things you can **C**ontrol, things you can **I**nfluence, and things you can **A**cept about the situation. Take action on the first two columns, and let go of the third.
3. **Collage treatment.** For the artistically inclined, turn your worry into a work of art. Gather a big piece of construction paper, scissors, glue, a pile of old magazines, and a quiet hour or two. Cut out words and images from the magazines that symbolize your worry, and glue them on the paper in a way that reflects how you're feeling. Use your imagination and go all out! Then, if you like, take a new sheet of paper. This time look for words and images that embody your best-case scenario. Create a new collage that reflects what you *want* to happen. Take your best-case work of art and display it prominently where you it will cheer you up when you feel overwhelmed. Put your worry collage away.
4. **Count the days.** So far, I've successfully survived 14,862 days (do the math, I don't mind). That's a whole lot of days, ranging from sublime to horrendous, and I've gotten through them all. Calculate your days. Know that you've survived (even thrived) through them all, and you will get through the days to come.
5. **Diamond in the rough.** When you look for coal, you'll get coal. When you look for diamonds, you'll definitely find diamonds (although it might take a little longer). What are the diamonds in your situation? What are you learning? Who might benefit? What gifts are you getting from all this? You may not have (or want) the answers right now, but ask the questions anyway. As you work through your troubles, you'll find unexpected gifts, opportunities, and lessons showing up because somewhere inside you started looking for them.
6. **Duly noted.** Keep a small notebook with you. Every time you have a worrisome thought, write it down. Remove it from your brain and capture it forever on paper, telling yourself you can worry about it later. Then, once a week, take that paper and shred, burn, or line the birdcage with it! Make it a fun ritual.
7. **Freebird.** If you're a visual person, sometimes it helps to imagine your thoughts as something tangible. I often picture worrisome thoughts as trapped birds, frantically flapping around in my head. Then I imagine opening a window and letting them fly out. While you can use any image that works for you, I recommend finding something that signifies "letting go" or "releasing."



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8. **Get in gear.** Worrying is a lot like having your foot on the gas pedal without the car being in gear. You waste a lot of gas but don't go anywhere. Change that potential energy into kinetic energy! Go for a walk, run up a flight of stairs, turn on some music and dance. Move your body and change your chemistry.
9. **Get smart.** Do some research. Get educated. Learn the facts. Worry gets its best foothold when we don't have enough data. Our mind tries to fill in the gaps, and invariably latches onto the worst. Crowd out the noise with solid information with which to build your plan of action.
10. **Gratitude attitude.** Worry can thrive when you're in a *scarcity* state of mind. When you feel solid and secure in your strengths and resources, worry doesn't have fertile ground to sow its seeds. A way to bring you back to a place of *abundance* is to make a long list of what you're grateful for in your life.
11. **Higher help.** Many people find the best way to quell worries is to surrender them to a power higher than themselves. God, Spirit, Universe, Higher Self, Truth, Nature, or whatever benevolent force brings you strength, love, and courage. The act of praying, surrendering, or letting go can have a powerful impact on your mind, body, and soul.
12. **Let there be light.** Sometimes the best way to dispel your worries is to bring them into the light of day and shake them out a bit. Find a trusted and relatively objective friend or family member, and ask them to help you dispel your fears. Ask them to help you challenge each of your worries, and brainstorm possible solutions to each problem. In return, you can do the same for them sometime.
13. **Method acting.** How do you want to feel right now? If you were handling this situation with grace and aplomb, what would that feel like? How would you be sitting, standing, looking, acting, feeling? What's your facial expression? Just as our body believes our brain, our brain also believes our body. Sit up straight. Smile. Relax. Act as if you have everything under control. Practice getting yourself into a confident state, and soon you'll be able to go there at will.
14. **Never fear, volunteer.** One sure way to lessen your own troubles is to focus on someone else's. Volunteering for people with challenges greater than your own really puts things in perspective, and often gives you the strength and gratitude to face your own situation with renewed vigor.
15. **Now's OK.** Bring yourself back to the present. Where are you and what are you doing *right now*? Eating breakfast, driving your car, sitting in your office, brushing your teeth, walking the dog? Chances are you're in familiar territory. Is there anything in this moment that's truly unmanageable? Do this each time you feel overwhelmed. By returning to the present, you reclaim your power over the situation and your life. Even when you're faced with a new situation, assess the present and know that you're *handling* it, right now.



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16. **Odds are.** What are the chances that your worst-case scenario will actually happen? How often does it really take place? What are the statistics? Getting real about the probability can lessen worry's hold on your brain.
17. **On a scale of 10 to 1.** On a "worry intensity" scale of 1 to 10, take your worry and label it a 10. (Even if you don't feel it's worth a "10," start there). Assess how you see and feel about the situation as a 10. Then, ask yourself what your situation would look like if it were a 9. Then an 8. Then 7. And so on, until you imagine your situation as a 1. Imagine what a 1 feels like, looks like, sounds like. Any better? If so, go back and analyze what that made each level less intense, and see what can be done to move your situation in that direction.
18. **Put worry in your Daytimer.** What if you just can't stop worrying, or don't want to? Schedule it. Set aside 10 minutes a day, or 30 minutes twice a week, or whatever you can spare, then go for it! Create a worry space that allows you to fret with reckless abandon. The catch? *Only worry then and there.* No other time. Make a firm commitment that you'll save your time and energy for more productive endeavors the rest of the time.
19. **Siphon the sludge.** Here's journaling in its rawest state. Instead of writing neat lines of carefully crafted, soul-searching words in a beautiful, Borders-bought journal, take a run-of-the-mill spiral-bound notebook and an industrial strength pen. Start writing whatever comes out of your head. Ignore grammar, punctuation, spelling, logic. Write quickly and uncensored. No one (but NO ONE) will see this but you. Write and write and write and let the accompanying feelings follow the words onto the paper. Get it all out until you run out of words or are too tired to write any more. Then burn the paper.
20. **Stop!** Since worrying is a habit, and often a stubborn one, you may need to police your brain for a while. As soon as you recognize your worrisome thoughts, shout "STOP!!" silently in your head (if you do this out loud, you might actually create new things to worry about). Snapping a rubber band on your wrist is another tactic. Anything that abruptly stops the flow of thoughts and redirects you to the present is useful.
21. **Switch.** The "Stop" technique works best when you have something to immediately replace your worrisome thoughts. Predetermine your replacement thought or activity – something both engaging and emotionally neutral. It might be practicing a musical instrument, working on a current hobby, playing a game, or going over the steps of a new home project. It could be reliving a favorite vacation or sports event. My secret weapon is a Palm Scrabble game. When my brain gets noisy, I whip that puppy out and start playing, and soon my brain is fully engaged in how to make a word out of XHJBKQ.



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22. **Tell the story.** It often helps to get some emotional distance from your troubles. Fast forward into the future, and imagine telling the story of your situation to someone as if it had happened five years ago. Talk about what happened (preferably describing the best-case scenario), how it all played out, what you learned, and how you grew from it all. Use your imagination, and fill in the details. If it helps, you might want to write this down. You can then put it aside and face your situation with greater objectivity. You might even save the story and look at it again in five years for comparison!
23. **To Do, Ta Da.** If you're going through a particularly arduous, extended process (job change, divorce, illness, relocation), you may feel long on worries and short on progress. One way to help see forward movement is to create a weekly "To Do, Ta Da" list. Write down all the things you want or need to do that week (you can get these tasks from your CIA list) in a left hand "To Do" column. Then transfer all your completed tasks in a right-hand "Ta Da" list at the end of the week. It helps you visualize real progress, and is a record of your process over the long haul. If you're having a particularly hard day, look at the "Ta Da" column over the past few weeks, and revel in your efforts!
24. **What If...Then What?** For some people, diving all the way down into the worst-case scenario can be a key to neutralizing worry's power. To do this, first ask "What if...[worst-case scenario]... happened? Then ask yourself, "Then what?" Then ask it again. Keep asking "then what" until you've either run out of possibly tragedies, or the final scenario is so ridiculous you realize you're worrying for no good reason.
25. **X marks the spot.** Worry shows up as physical sensations in our bodies. Sometimes ferreting out the physical feeling works better than quelling the thoughts. So when you recognize that you're anxious or worried, stop, sit still, and explore where that feeling is coming from. Is your stomach queasy? Your chest tight? Your throat constricted? Zero in on what your body is doing. Once you've identified an area, focus on it for a while, and see if it changes. Then, try breathing "through it" – imagine that you're actually breathing in and out of your stomach, chest, throat, neck, wherever the discomfort is. After a while you'll start to feel the sensations subside, and with it your thoughts will quiet down.

Experiment with different techniques until you find one or more that work best for you. Adapt them to suit your own style and, most of all, play with it. Fun always trumps worry!

Feel free to share your results, comments, or other creative ways to break the worry habit by emailing me at Sue@selfmadeself.com.