

## Coping with College Series

### Excessive Worry Got You Down?

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Everyone has times in his or her life that are characterized by worry. We worry before a major exams or at times when we're running late. Worry seems like nature's way of focusing our attention on problem areas in life.

Some of us seem able to generate worry that is proportional to the problem or risk being faced. Unfortunately, chronic worriers generate excessive worry over life problems that others seem to take in stride. If you are a chronic worrier, take heart. The following are some suggestions to help you overcome your worry habit.

One coping strategy is to examine your worry carefully. What is it you are worried about and what outcome do you dread? If that outcome did occur, what would that mean, about you, about the world, or about some other person? Answering these questions often deflates our fear to manageable levels. Chronic worriers often discover that even the worst outcome, even though it's uncomfortable, can be managed. Chronic worriers often forget to think through the consequences long enough to discover this.

Another coping strategy involves identifying the worst likely outcome and preparing for it. Rather than having vague feelings of fear and dread, ask yourself, what specifically and I afraid will happen. After identifying the dreaded outcome use the "PR plan" to cope. The "PR plan" stands for, Predict/Prepare/and Practice. You predict what bad thing might happen in a feared situation, you prepare a plan to deal with that negative outcome, and finally, you practice your coping strategy.

For example, if you worry about driving in a strange city, you may realize that what you are really afraid of is getting lost. Knowing this, you can use the PR plan to cope. First, you can imagine that you will become lost (predict) and then design a coping strategy for dealing with that outcome (prepare). This might lead you to take some maps, to remind yourself of places you might stop and ask for directions, and to develop some coping techniques such as "using positive self-talk" to keep your anxiety at a manageable level. You might practice, by creating some mental imagery of getting lost, checking your map, asking directions, repeating calming statements to yourself, all in the privacy of your imagination. You might also practice by talking to someone who has coped with a similar problem to help you mentally rehearse your response and to learn other ways of handling the situation.

If you are wanting to develop more skill at handling worry productively, or of gaining more understanding of the factors which fuel your tendency toward chronic worry, consider discussing your concerns with a counselor at Student Counseling Services. Alternatively, you might explore some self-help books like Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David Burns or Mind over Mood by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky. Don't let chronic worry remain a chronic problem.