

Overcoming needless worry

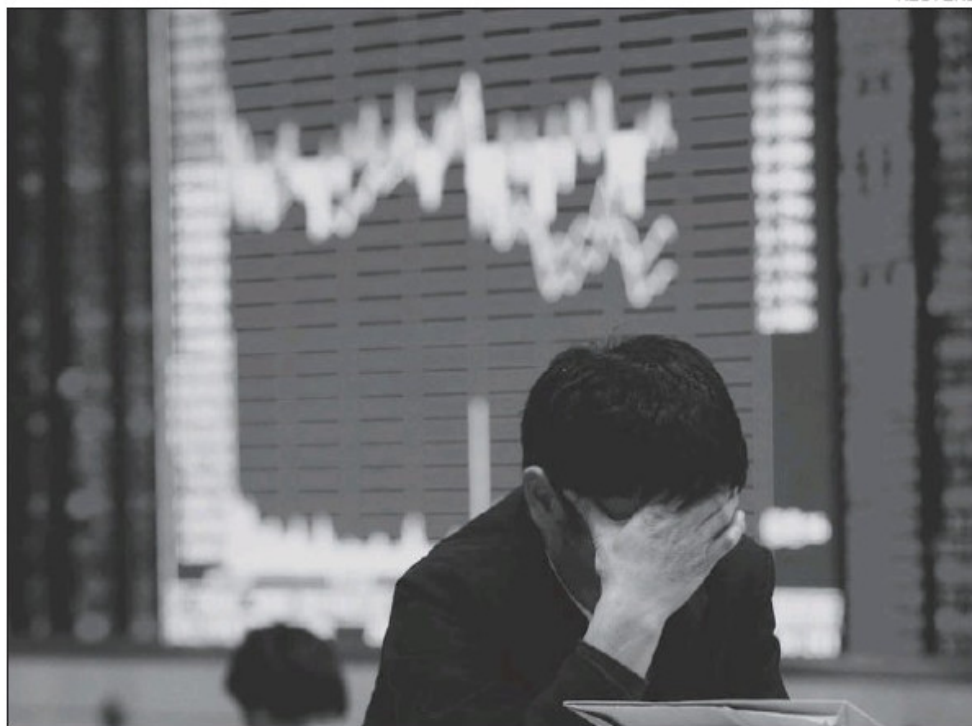
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MORE AND MORE PEOPLE are being affected by anxiety. Here's how to combat those negative thoughts

"I am an old man and I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."

REUTERS



We sometimes have good cause to be anxious, but 95 per cent of what we worry about never ends up happening.

— Mark Twain

Why do we worry? Why is it so hard to stop?

These are the questions I often hear from my clients. They tell me how worrying affects their lives on a daily basis, how it depletes their happiness and stops them from being all they could be.

They describe this worry as an endless loop of negative, fearful thoughts that they can't seem to shake or ignore for more than a short period of time.

Even when there is a joyful time, they say that they can't really enjoy it because they worry about it stopping.

More and more people are being affected by anxiety, and it is causing more and more problems. I have seen clients as young as 6 and as old as 86 suffering from being in this constant state of worry. What a way to live your life!

This relentless worry saps all joy and celebration that could be happening in the moment and focuses on a negative future filled with the worst possible scenarios.

Studies have shown that the worst possible scenario rarely happens, yet for some reason, most of these worriers hold on to their fears, falsely believing that in some way it protects them from some kind of disaster happening.

The truth is the disaster is unlikely to happen because of statistics, not because they are holding on to the fear, but they don't realize this and think it keeps them safe.

Where does it come from?

If you have had a parent who was a worrier, negative, perfectionistic, critical or anxious (and who hasn't had a parent with some of these issues?), then you have been weaned on worry.

The more your parents communicated a fearful, overly cautious attitude, the more you will come to view the world as a dangerous place. When you learn that the outside world is threatening, you automatically restrict your exploration and risk-taking and feel more anxious about what's out there.

This also applies to parents who may have neglected you, who had addictions or who discouraged you from expressing your feelings. If you got the message that you must be careful about what you say and how you say it, this could lead to feelings of anxiety as well.

As a child, you wanted to please your parents. If, however, one of your parents was nervous or worried, chances are you never completely succeeded in pleasing them, which could have made you feel inadequate, like a failure, thus producing the "worry gene."

Of course, your parents did not do this intentionally. They did the best they could with what they knew at the time. We are not here to blame these parents, but to help you understand where it came from.

Where else?

Another factor and big influence on creating fearful thoughts is the world we live in, specifically the media.

The media is geared to making you worried and stressed. It promotes feeling unsafe and threatened by the information it chooses to report and publicize.

What do you hear on the news, the Internet, the TV? Reports of ongoing disasters, murders, viruses, injustices and the hint that if it hasn't touched you yet, it probably will soon. Is it a surprise that the average person thinks 60,000 to 80,000 thoughts per day and most are negative ones?

The truth is, these anxious thoughts do not protect you. Any fear-producing thought is not a protection — it is sabotaging your happiness and not allowing you to enjoy the pleasure in your present moment. It is focused on the future, and no one knows what the future will bring. Why expect the worst?

Did you know that 95 per cent of what you worry about never happens? So the people who believe that worrying is protecting them from bad things happening are giving away their joy for nothing. It's not worrying that protects you — it is the fact that most of the time nothing bad is going to happen anyway. You need to learn to give up this faulty belief.

Some people call anxiety and worrying "a negative fantasy." The problem does not exist in the present moment, only in the future. Once you are focused on your present and how your life is going now and trust that the future will probably work out, your worrying will decrease.