

# what, you WORRY?

shapeover

## THIS MONTH'S PROBLEM

You're always anxious about bad things that *might* happen. Here's how to quiet your mind so you can enjoy today.

By Kim Acosta

### The Challenge

To learn the difference between productive and unproductive worry

Not all worry is bad: Thinking ahead helps you plan for upcoming events and accomplish goals. But the unproductive type centers on things that are largely out of your control, such as whether you'll get a life-threatening disease, lose a loved one or be laid off, and only serves to make you miserable. "Worriers believe they'll be prepared for the worst," says Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D., director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy in New York City and author of *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry From Stopping You* (Harmony Books, November 2005). "But that's like saying the best thing to do for the future is to make yourself really depressed today."



### The Solutions

► **Scrutinize your worry.** Ask yourself whether there is anything you can do to lessen your anxiety *right now*, Leahy says. For instance, if you're nervous about an upcoming business trip, list what you need to do to prepare, such as practicing your presentation, and cross things off as you complete them. If there is nothing tangible to cross off, then you know that you're dealing with unproductive worry.

### 1-minute shapeovers

#### before

- You obsess 24/7 about an upcoming work presentation that took you several weeks to prepare.
- You worry that your boyfriend will cheat, and the third degree you give him whenever he goes out is making him think it may be time to move on.
- You worry that tragedies you see on the news – such as plane crashes or workplace shootings – will happen to you.

#### after

- You remind yourself that you've prepared, then describe everything you see in the room to help you refocus.
- You accept that while you can't guarantee he won't sleep around, you've survived past breakups and could probably handle this one too.
- You remind yourself that what you're seeing is on TV precisely *because* it's an uncommon event.

► **Accept some uncertainty.** Although no one can guarantee that your friends or family will never get mad at you or you won't be rejected by that cute guy at the gym, remember that uncertainty is neutral. "Don't assume that just because you don't know the outcome, it will be bad," Leahy says.

► **Seek relief in your past.** Worriers tend to underestimate how well they would do if something unpleasant *did* happen. Think back to how you handled negative events you've experienced; chances are you weathered them OK.

Just because you don't know the outcome doesn't mean it's bad.

Also reminisce about past worries: Recognizing that your previous fears never or rarely materialized can help you get a grip on current anxieties.

► **Prioritize your concern.** "People often worry about things they've never had," Leahy says, "such as making a certain amount of money or looking a certain way." Food, air and water ... these are necessities. Take a moment to recognize that what you're anxious about probably isn't.

### The Payoff

Saying *sayonara* to unproductive worry means you'll be less anxious and depressed; plus you'll sleep better and may even have fewer headaches and digestive problems. Not to mention you'll be a whole lot more fun to be around!

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