

Challenging worries and anxious thoughts

Coping with stress and anxiety

High levels of anxiety and stress are usually fuelled by the way we think. For example, you might be having thoughts such as “There is nothing I can do” or “I won’t be able to cope.” These thoughts can be so strong that you believe them to be true. They can contribute to anxiety and depression, and they can change the way you behave. For example, they might make you withdraw from other people, which can feed into more negative thoughts and feelings.

However, not all our thoughts are facts; many are simply beliefs that we hold. Sometimes we have held these beliefs for so long that they feel like facts. How do we know if our thoughts are true or are just beliefs we’ve grown used to? Here are some ways to work through and challenge your worries and anxious thoughts.

- Start with catching your thoughts. When you are feeling anxious or stressed, stop and write down what you are thinking. There may be more than one thought going through your mind when you are feeling anxious. (Hint: Your thought might sound something like “What if ...” or “I’m worried that ...”.)
- Once you have identified a thought, challenge it. Ask yourself:
 - Is this thought true?
 - How do I know it’s true?
 - Is it 100% true and always true?
 - What is the evidence for the thought?
 - What is the evidence against the thought?
 - Has the thing I’m worried about ever happened before?
 - What actually happened?
 - How did I cope? What was the end result?
- If you find it hard to let go of worrying, ask yourself, “What does worrying do for me? Is worrying actually helping me solve a problem or is it keeping me stuck and feeling anxious?”
- Ask yourself how helpful it is to keep thinking this way.
- After working through these approaches, see if you can come up with a more balanced thought. For example, “I’ve messed everything up. I can’t do anything right” could be replaced with, “I see what didn’t work well and I know what I can do differently next time.”

This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources

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