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Check into the CALM CLINIC

IF WORRY AND ANXIETY ARE KEEPING YOU UP AT NIGHT, IT'S TIME TO TAKE CONTROL OF WHAT'S TROUBLING YOU, WITH OUR EXPERT ADVICE ON HOW TO HIT THE CALM BUTTON INSTEAD OF GOING INTO A STATE OF PANIC STATIONS

WRITTEN BY GEMMA WHITE

When does normal, everyday worrying become something that you should... well... start to worry about? For most

of us, our daily life is peppered with minor incidents that can cause momentary concern – a looming deadline at work, an exam to be passed or a disagreement with a friend or colleague – but for some women, small frets can quickly escalate into excessive worrying, creating problems which can suddenly seem insurmountable. And while high levels of anxiety are proven to have a detrimental effect on all areas of your life, bringing with it a myriad of physical and psychological problems and affecting relationships, employment, sleep and lifestyle, by developing an awareness of your thought processes during times of anxiety and

WHEN TO WORRY ABOUT YOUR WORRYING

Performance in high-stress events such as a job interview or an important exam can actually benefit from a little worry, with studies showing that minor anxiety about a test can push us to study more or do more research about a potential new employer. However, anxiety can become a problem when merely thinking about a stressful situation causes immediate and excessive distress.

"Normal worry is short lived and results in solution-focused behaviour," says Dr Jessica Lee, Clinical Psychologist at Infinity Clinic, Dubai. "Worry becomes problematic when it's about a number of things, is very frequent and is difficult to control or dismiss. Prolonged worrying or frequent worrying generates more anxiety

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FAMOUS AND FRETTING

"I was just kind of immobilised by it [anxiety-induced panic attacks, which plagued her younger years]. I didn't want to go to my friends' houses or hang out with anybody, and nobody understood. I felt really out of control of my surroundings."

EMMA STONE

DON'T PANIC!

Experts insist it's vital not to react by running away from situations that cause concern, as this may exacerbate feelings of anxiety. "Anxiety is a normal and human response to situations that may be stressing; it's an adaptive instinct to worry when something is wrong or challenging," says Dr Valeria Risoli, Clinical Psychologist at Dubai Physiotherapy & Family Medicine Clinic. "Avoiding situations that we consider trigger our worrying is a dysfunctional and inappropriate response to an anxiety problem."

CAN'T SLEEP, CAN'T EAT, CAN'T FOCUS

High levels of stress and anxiety can present themselves in such a myriad of ways that someone who worries unnecessarily may not immediately be aware of the physical and emotional manifestations of the problem. Dr Lee says: "Physically, prolonged exposure to stress and adrenaline has an impact on our ability to digest food, repair the body, sleep well and eat well." And the major symptoms of worrying include insomnia, loss of appetite (or alternatively, excessive eating), inability to concentrate, irritability, shortness of breath and sweating, although sufferers may also experience muscle tension, fatigue and a dry mouth.

"A person's social life is affected as well, as extreme worriers tend to avoid social situations because of excessive preoccupation about the way they look, concern for what other people may think of them and fear, although irrational, that something bad may happen," notes Dr Risoli. "Personal and social relationships suffer too, because women who worry tend to easily fall in conflict with other people; they worry, they are nervous, they get angry for little things, their mood changes and consequently they think that others do not really understand their feelings."

FAMOUS AND FRETTING

"I have anxiety attacks. The more successful I get, the more insecurities I'm getting."

ADELE

STICK WITH YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

If you classify yourself as a 'worrier', it's important to take daily stock of how you feel, both physically and emotionally, so that you can identify anything out of the ordinary as well as any health-affecting trends, which may re-occur, such as comfort eating during times of high stress.

Recent studies have shown that anxiety and depression are exacerbated when we cut ourselves off from family and friends, and that we should actually do the opposite during periods of high anxiety. "Healthy relationships are important factors; if we are surrounded by a social net of positive and trusting relationships we feel supported and understood, and this is very helpful to reduce our worries and stress. Having at least a good friend to listen to us when we need it is a necessity," says Dr Risoli.

FACING YOUR FEARS

For some sufferers, burying their head in the sand is their 'feel safe' reaction to high levels of stress and anxiety; however, psychologists warn that this is the adult equivalent of children closing their eyes and believing that because they can't see you, you can't see them.

"Although it might seem counter-intuitive, trying to control worries can actually increase them," reveals Dr Lee. "Many people will attempt to distract themselves from their worries, suppress their worries or avoid worrying situations as a way of controlling them. This rarely works and therefore adds to a sense of worrying as being out of control." Instead, experts have long espoused the benefits of confronting your fears as a way of taking yourself out of your comfort zone, building confidence and reducing anxiety.

BE PROACTIVE

"I would suggest people take a proactive approach to postponing their worries (when the worries are not about immediate events that need action)," proposes Dr Lee. "Create a 'worry period' – a time and place when you are going to do your worrying for the day. Then when worries come up, you note them down on a piece of paper or on your phone and tell yourself that you will deal with them in your worry period. The last step is to follow through and come back to your worries at the designated time. What you do with the worries at that point might involve problem solving. Very often the passage of time allows us to naturally come up with a solution or to dismiss the worry. Very often people predict that they won't be able to postpone their worries, but most are surprised by their ability to do this and it starts to build confidence."

FAMOUS AND FRETTING

"When I'm not working, the first couple of weeks are fantastic, then towards the end of the first month I start to have anxiety attacks."

SCARLETT JOHANSSON

INSTANT STRESS BUSTERS

Manage Your Expectations: If you're worrying about a problem, remember to balance out your fears with thinking about what could go right, not just what might go wrong.

Get Healthier: "A healthy lifestyle is always recommended for everyone: healthy diet, meditation and relaxation exercises, and sports are good habits to start with," advises Dr Risoli.

Forget The Future: Most worry is focused on the future, and as we can't control or predict the future, our anxiety is exacerbated.

Experts suggest turning your attention to the present using the Eastern meditative philosophy of 'mindfulness' – concentrating on the here and now.