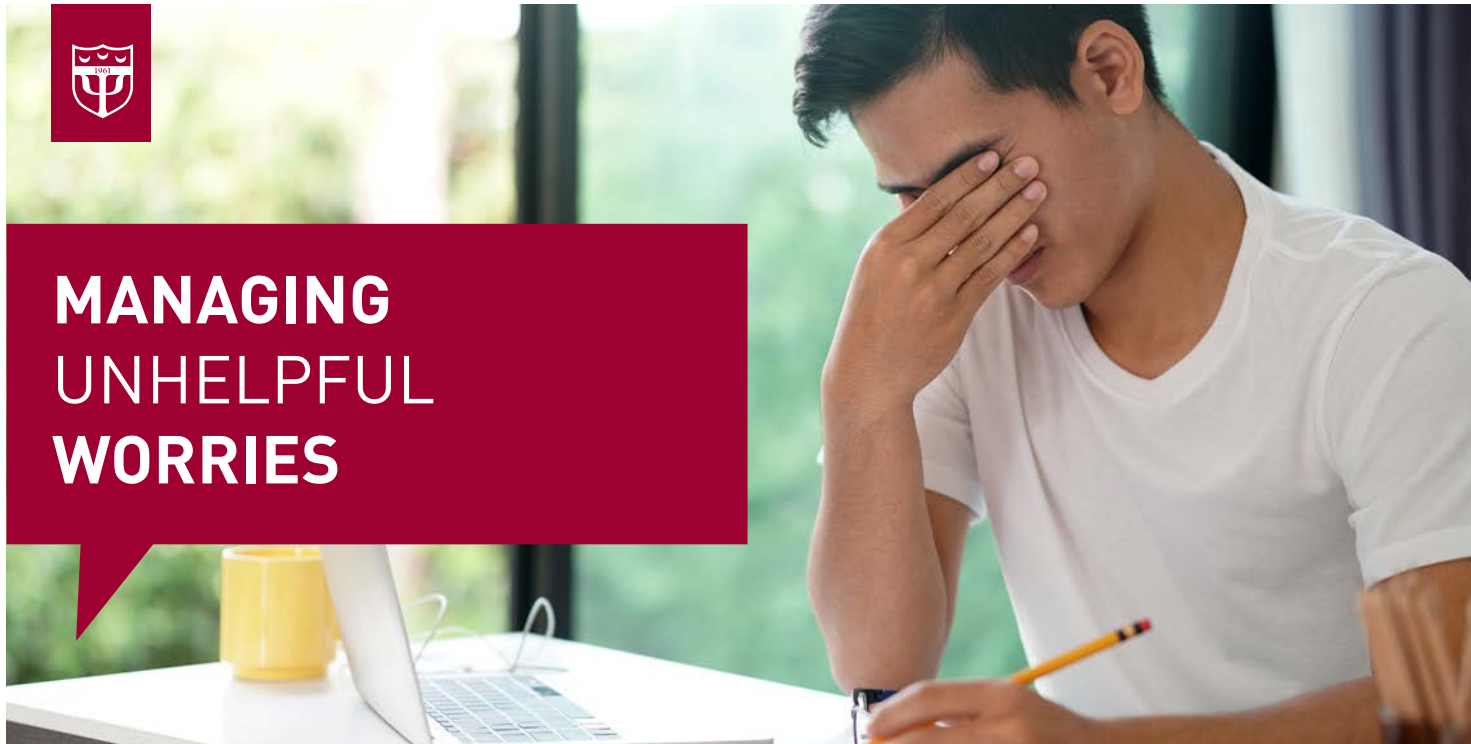




MANAGING UNHELPFUL WORRIES



Did you know that it is possible to be stressed and not be aware of it? Sometimes we can be so used to feeling rushed or worried that we don't take the time to check in with how we are feeling.

Everyone experiences stress from time to time. In fact, it's a normal response to a dangerous or challenging situation.

While a small amount of stress can increase motivation and energy, too much stress can make us feel overwhelmed. Over a long period of time, stress can affect our well-being. It can cause physical symptoms like stomach complaints, headaches, and muscle tension around the jaw, shoulders, and neck.

Most people are surprised by just how many things they are stressing about at any given moment. Whether it is an important project deadline or a concern over how someone will react to something involving you, you could likely be stressing about a few things right now. To help you better manage your current stressors, we are sharing a simple, four-step mental health exercise that our psychologists often recommend.

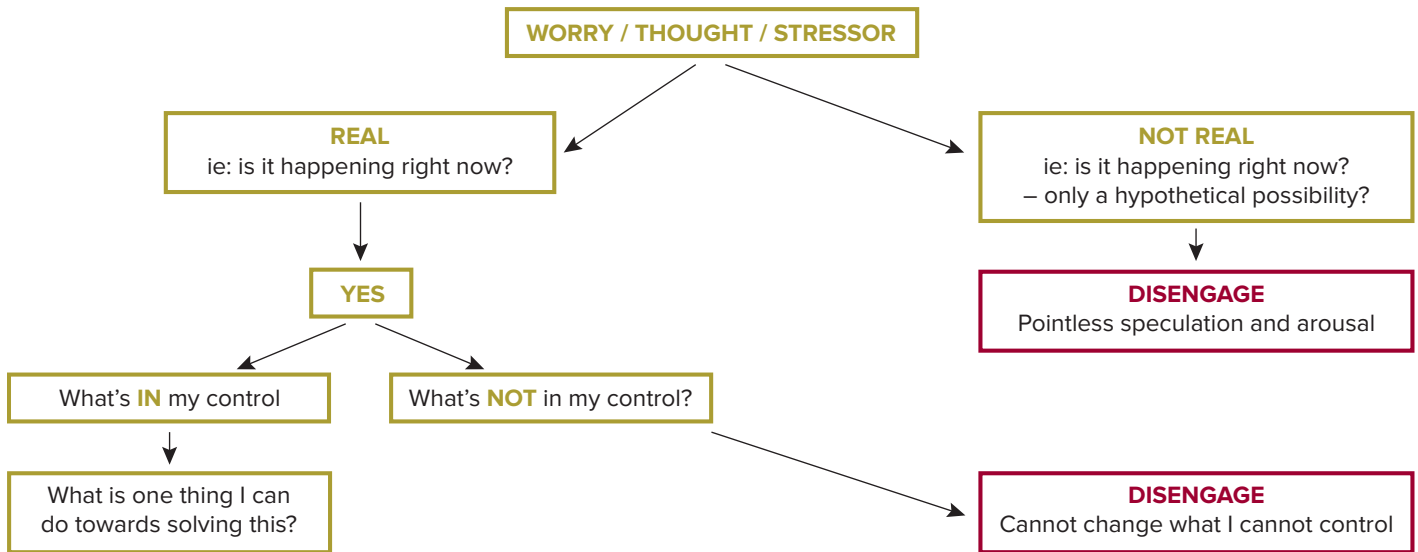
Try working through this activity every morning for one month. Try to set aside five or ten minutes each day and see how you feel after a few weeks. We recommend doing this in the morning. Thinking about stressful things in the evening can make it difficult to sleep.

Step 1: Identify your worries

Find a quiet place to sit and breathe. Notice what thoughts have been occupying your mind. Some thoughts might be sad and/or negative, and this can be okay; however, it can be a problem if they are constantly on your mind or if the thoughts lead to feelings of stress or anxiety. So, think about your thoughts. Are they helpful? Is it difficult to 'park' these thoughts and enjoy happier thoughts? If so, try step 2.

Step 2: Write it all down

Writing down your worries is a great way to become aware of all of the everyday things that are stressing you out. Try to get them all down on paper, and don't worry about putting them in order. As you go along, you might notice that some of the things you write down are problems you can act on. Others are hypothetical situations or things that you probably cannot do anything about today. Recognising that there will always be situations that you cannot immediately control or change is healthy.



Step 3: Stick in in a flowchart

Once everything is down on paper, try working each of your worries through this nifty little flow chart. By breaking down your concerns into things that you can and cannot control, you will better understand where to put your emotional energy. Try to act on some of the things that you can do something about and mindfully acknowledge the issues beyond your control.

Step 4: Make it a routine

Making this activity a routine is a clever way of creating a healthy habit. Over time, your brain will begin to identify hypothetical worries and separate them from issues that you can do something about. Remember, recognising the difference between a hypothetical problem and one that you can problem-solve today is a great way to reduce stress and regain control of your thought processes.

Further information

For more information about stress reduction techniques or to make an appointment with a qualified mental health professional, contact the Cairnmillar Institute on **1800 391 393** or **www.cairnmillar.org.au**