



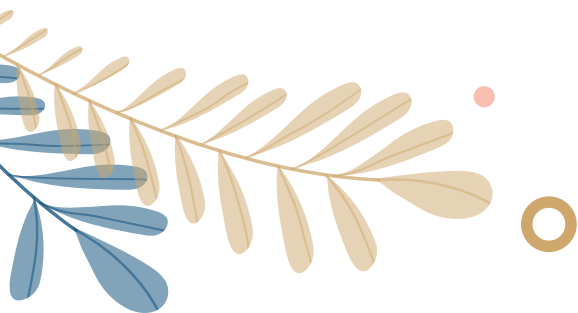
# COPING WITH WORRIES: A DEEPER DIVE

## SOME DEGREE OF WORRY ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE AND CONSEQUENCES OF A THROMBOSIS ARE BOTH INEVITABLE AND PROBABLY QUITE HELPFUL.

It is important to think through the consequence of the event, how to manage its impact on health, life, and so on. However, for some people, this worry can become oppressive, and begin to dominate life. It takes up a lot of time, and can lead to anxiety, distress, and impact on a range of aspects of our life, including family relationships, work, and sleep.

If this experience is familiar to you, you are not alone. Around one quarter of people who have had a thrombosis have such a high level of worries related to it, they reach 'clinical levels' of worry; and nearly half experience problematic levels of anxiety about their health. These usually fade over time, but while they are present, they can be very distressing.

This information sheet considers a number of strategies to help you reduce the frequency and impact of any worries you may have. But first, it looks at the nature of worry, and why we suggest the strategies we do.



### QUICK GUIDE TO DISTRACTION

#### Things you can think



Think about planning your next holiday



Think about what you are going to do at the weekend



Count all the red doors you can see as you drive past them on the bus or in the car



Counting backwards in 3s from 47, while imagining the numbers in your head



Think of five music acts beginning with A... B... C...

#### Things you can do



Talking to someone about anything other than the worry on your mind



Watching a film or read a book

## Worry is normal

One of the challenges we all face is that worry is a normal process and is often beneficial. You could almost say, we are designed to worry. If we don't worry about things, then we are unlikely to be motivated to deal with any problems we face effectively. Worry motivates action and pushes us to work out solutions to problems.

Worrying about the implications of a clot may lead someone to go on the internet and find out more about their condition, its treatment, and so on. It may lead them to think through a list of questions to ask when they meet a health care professional. Once this action has been taken, and the person has the information they need, or has a plan of action to deal with the problem, the need to worry and any related anxiety usually reduces.

So, worry that leads to a solution is beneficial, and usually results in a reduction in anxiety once the issue is dealt with.

By contrast, worry that does not or cannot lead to a solution - what is the doctor going to say at my next appointment, what did my last MRI show, am I going to have another clot despite being on blood thinners, and so on - cannot be resolved in this way, and it becomes a problem in itself. Unfortunately, these 'what if?' and 'worst case scenario' thoughts can be easy to get hooked into, and difficult to disengage from. We may even feel that we need to have such worries (we don't!)

So, one key issue in managing worry involves working out whether any particular worry is 'useful' (e.g it will lead to solving a problem) or 'useless' (it involves thinking about issues which cannot be resolved, and may be quite destructive). If a worry is useful, then it needs to be attended to and thought through. If not, ideally it should be ignored - although, as we all know, this is easier said than done.

One problem with these types of worries is that they can become habitual. They are triggered by reminders of our health problems, or even contexts in which we have previously worried, such as while watching TV, driving to work and so on. So, a key element of stopping them is to break these habits.



## STOP WORRYING!

Whether a particular worry will benefit from a degree of focus or not, the key to effective management of worry is to confine any worries to a planned 'worry time'. A time in the day that you choose to actively think about things that are on your mind (if you choose) and to disengage from your worries at all other times. In this way, you take control over the worries, rather than them taking control over you.

### Make a worry-time

It may seem odd that the first strategy to reducing worries involves making time to think about them. But there is plenty of evidence that shows that trying to completely suppress any thoughts or worries about a particular issue actually increases the amount of time we end up doing so! As noted earlier, we are designed to worry, and it is almost impossible to not do so. And if worry could lead to beneficial solutions to problems, then it is crucial that we take time to focus on them.

So, there are good reasons to spend some time focusing on our concerns. But this time needs to be controlled and time-managed.

Having a 'worry time' gives you permission to stop thinking about your concerns at other times of the day. It can be as short or long as necessary, but you need to identify a time, and a time limit, and try to stick to it.

### Ideally, any worry time needs to be:



If worries occur at any other time of the day, they can be postponed until this time. If you are concerned you may forget the issue, write a reminder to yourself and then let go of the worry.

It is important to note that you do not have to use your worry time, but knowing it is there if you choose to use it makes it easier to distract from worries during the day.

## DISTRACTING FROM WORRIES

Once you have set a worry time, you can use simple distraction techniques to stop worries being the focus of your attention at all other times.

Distraction does not mean trying not to think about an issue or worry - it means consciously and deliberately focusing on something (anything!) other than the worry. What you think about is not important. The most important thing is that you think about it immediately the worry comes to mind and that this distraction becomes the full focus of your attention.

It is also important to plan what your distraction strategy will be before the time comes for you to use it. Having to think on the spot as worries begin to get their grip is increasingly difficult and may mean you are unable to pull away from them. Think of the worries as a hook you want to avoid. Once you are on the hook, it's more difficult to unhook yourself than never get hooked in the first place.

### SOME DISTRACTIONS PEOPLE HAVE USED INCLUDE:

#### Things you can think

These can include spontaneous thoughts, including:

- planning your next holiday
- thinking what you are going to do at the weekend
- counting all the red doors you can see as you drive past them on the bus

#### Or more pre-prepared thoughts, including:

- Counting backwards in 3s from 47, while imagining the numbers in your head
- Thinking of:
  - five names of football teams beginning with A... B...
  - five music acts beginning with A... B... C...
  - a calm or favourite place
  - Memories of a holiday or other enjoyable time

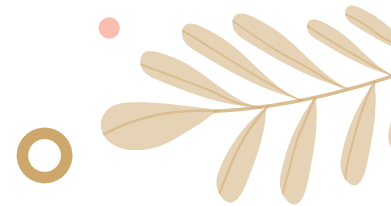
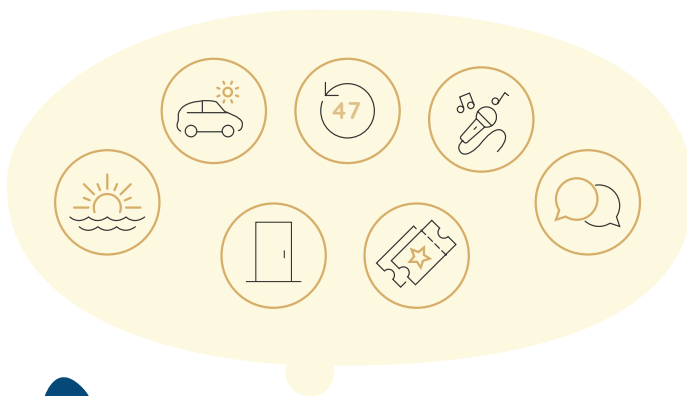
#### Things you can do

- Talking to someone about anything other than the worry on your mind
- Absorbing yourself in something interesting or fun to do
- Watching a film or reading a book - but be careful to really focus on the plot, not simply do this while actually focusing on your worries

The key to all these strategies is to focus on the distractor. This may mean you may have to do things slightly differently to normal. For example, if you are reading a book or article online, don't skim read - focus on each word of each sentence - almost as if you are reading to an audience - until you are absorbed in the content. Don't forget, you are reading to distract not for the pleasure of reading.

You don't have to distract for a long time, particularly if you are doing so during a busy day. Distract for a minute or so, then try to absorb yourself in whatever is going on around you. If the worries come back, which they often do as they are a well-established habit, distract again. You may be successful; you may be unsuccessful. But every time you try to try to distract you are chipping into the habit, and slowly making it easier to break.

Different strategies work for different people and at different times of the day - keeping busy may be more helpful in the day, thinking of a favourite place or listening to an audiobook may be more helpful at night. The important thing is to find one or more strategies that work for you.



## PLANNING HELPS

It is worth spending a few minutes thinking through what may work for you. Your ideas may be as sensible or crazy as you like - no one else need know what you are thinking or doing! Jot down some of your ideas in the space below. It's worth thinking of a few strategies you can use - perhaps with separate one for worries during the day and those at night - so you can try them all out and find the one that works best for you.



**My distraction strategies in the day will be:**

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**My distraction strategies at night will be:**

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Once you have planned your distraction strategies, try to use them every time a worry comes to mind. You may not always be successful, but keep trying. The more you use them, the easier you will find it to disengage from your worries.



### Links to support groups

Thrombosis UK ([www.thrombosisuk.org](http://www.thrombosisuk.org))

Email: [admin@thrombosisuk.org](mailto:admin@thrombosisuk.org)



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