

COPING WITH ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

You know when your mind just won't let up? When it keeps you on edge reminding you that you have an endless to-do list and convinces you of the worst-case scenario always happening? It's hard to not feel riddled with anxious thought patterns and indulge in unmanaged stress from time to time – but there is a price to pay in the form of your physical health when left unmanaged.

Sometimes we tend to jump to the worst-case scenario and obsess over “what if’s”. This is a way for our mind to protect us and prepare us for terrible (and unlikely) outcomes. Ultimately, there isn't much worse than terrible outcomes, other than being blindsided by them. Identifying this pattern and replacing it with the ability to come back to the present, reminding yourself to not live through unfavorable outcomes twice, is a mindful coping mechanism.

One of the many Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques is guided discovery. Guided discovery is a process that can help challenge negative assumptions, reflect on how we process information and broaden our thinking.

This can be done with a therapist or self-guided. In each scenario, present the entire case with the goal of finding a neutral middle ground. You will need: 1) the case 2) the prosecution 3) the defense. For example: you are awaiting blood test results from a doctor and start to get anxious about results.

The Case: Awaiting blood test results.

Prosecution: I have been feeling very tired, hungry and thirsty; therefore, the blood test will reveal I am diabetic.



Defense: I haven't been sleeping well because of stress, contributing to fatigue. Stress has increased my appetite for specific foods, and I have not been drinking enough water.

Prosecution: Stress has my cravings for sweets through the roof. I have over-done sugar in my diet. Therefore, my blood sugar will be too high.

Defense: I have been eating a wholesome diet with plenty of variety and exercising. Dessert can fit in to a healthy lifestyle.

Neutral middle ground: No matter the test result, I have identified a habit of overindulging in sweet treats that I can work on in the meantime. I have identified stress as a possible trigger of sweet cravings and fatigue which I can also better manage in the meantime.

Following this thought pattern when faced with anxiety can help you find relief by opening you up to alternate thinking. If you are struggling with anxiety, depression, or can't seem get rid of negative thought patterns, talk to your doctor or therapist to develop an action plan. You can also develop self-help skills outlined in CBT that can aide in your treatment and breaking free from these negative emotions.