

Stress Management Techniques

Technique #1: Containment

When something is bothering us, it can be hard to get our minds to stop thinking about it. However, excessive worry is not helpful, and can have negative effects on our health.

Excessive worry can cause:

- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Inability to concentrate
- Irritability
- Muscle aches
- Muscle tension
- Nausea
- Nervous energy

Over time, chronic excessive worry can lead to:

- Suppression of the immune system
- Digestive disorders
- Muscle tension
- Short-term memory loss
- Premature coronary artery disease
- Heart attack

The first step to addressing excessive worry is recognizing the difference between healthy worry and unhealthy worry

Worry is healthy when:

The problem is something we have the power to solve, change, or alleviate

Our thoughts about the problem are *action-oriented*; they lead us to take action to alleviate the problem

Once we've decided what to do about the problem, we stop worrying about it

Worry is unhealthy when:

The problem is not in our control

Our thoughts are *problem-oriented*; instead of focusing on solutions, we just review the problem and replay worst-case scenarios in our minds

We continue to ruminate or worry even after we've decided on a course of action

If your worry is unhealthy or unhelpful, use the following Guided Imagery exercise to *contain* your worries.

Containment doesn't mean ignoring your problems. It means *choosing* when you are going to direct your mind towards alleviating them, rather than letting your problems choose when you are going to think about them. (If your problems had their way, you'd think about them all the time).

Find a calm, quiet place to sit or lay comfortably.

Close your eyes.

Take a few slow deep breaths, noticing where you feel the breath in your body.

Now imagine a strong, metal safe.

Using your imagination, notice the size, color, and texture of the safe.

The safe has a combination lock. Enter the combination and open the door.

Inside, the safe is smooth and dark and empty.

Now picture your worries, in whatever form they take. Perhaps they look like a whirlwind, perhaps they look like a pile. Picture not only your worries, but the negative emotions that come up when you worry. Spend a moment with the image of your troubles.

Now imagine yourself placing your worries into the safe.

Take as much time as you need to make sure *all* your worries get into the safe.

Now, close the door of the safe.

Lock the combination lock.

Step away from the safe and look at it.

All of your worries are contained in the safe.

The safe will stay closed until you choose to unlock and open it.

When it is time to deal with these problems and these emotions, you know right where they'll be, waiting for you.

But, for now, they are securely contained. They cannot force themselves on your mind. They cannot escape the safe without your permission.

