Worry Tree

Anxiety: Deciding What to Do With a Worry

The worry tree is a short set of questions that helps you decide what to do with a worry, so it stops going around in your head. Psychologists Gillian Butler and Tony Hope described it in their self-help book *Manage Your Mind*, and it is now a common tool in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for anxiety. You ask whether you can do anything about the worry, then either act on it, plan it, or let it go.

1 How the worry tree works

First, notice the worry. Ask yourself, "What exactly am I worried about?" **Then ask, "Is there anything I can do about it?"** Your answer sends you down one of three branches.

No, I can't Let it go	There is nothing useful you can do right now. Let the worry go and turn your attention to something else, like a task, a person, or what is around you.
Yes, right now Do it	There is a step you can take today. Do it, then let the worry go.
Yes, but later Plan it	The step can't happen yet. Write down what you will do and when you will do it, then let the worry go until then.

Why does this work? *Worrying can feel like problem solving, but going over the same fears again and again rarely leads to a decision. The worry tree sorts worries you can act on from worries you can't. That gives each worry a clear next step, either a plan or practice at letting the thought go.*

2 Try it on one worry

What exactly am I worried about?

Example: I might fail my driving test next week

Is there anything I can do about it? Which branch is it on?

My next step, or how I will let it go:

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3 Worry tree log

Each time a worry shows up this week, run it through the tree and write it down here.

The worry	Can I do something?	Now or later?	What I did or planned
I might fail my driving test	*Yes*	*Now*	*Booked a practice drive for Saturday, then went back to my book*
What if it rains at the wedding?	*No*		*Called a friend and talked about something else*

4 Letting a worry go

To let a worry go, gently move your attention to something else and let the thought fade in its own time. It may come back, and that is fine. Each time, notice it and move your attention again.

Things I can turn my attention to when I let a worry go:

Example: A walk around the block, a podcast, texting my sister

If worry takes up hours of your day or gets in the way of sleep, work, or relationships, a therapist who works with anxiety can help.

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