

Worry and anxiety detrimental to our health

by Mark Pavilons

Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.

Horrie Ten Boom

Living in the modern age, we take worry and stress in stride. It's part of our daily life and it's something we've come to expect.

It comes in all shapes and sizes, from trying to open one of those tiny butter containers in a restaurant, to misplacing your debit card.

As William Inge once pointed out, worry is interest paid on trouble before it comes due. Throughout my high school and college days, I was your typical worrywart. I was taken aback when I discovered that synonyms for this condition include doomsayer, killjoy and prophet of doom.

Prophet of misfortune or disaster, really?

I can say that I tend to be skeptical, but that's a good quality, especially in my profession.

But I've never been a killjoy. Heck I spread joy everywhere I go, ask anyone!

Worrying is a normal reaction to the stresses in our lives. Worrying unduly is where the problem arises.

As curious creatures, we're constantly asking ourselves, what if? That's great if we're testing new scientific theories, but not so good if we can't get out of bed in the morning.

I've experienced both.

When we face a stressful situation, we perceive it, rationalize it and sometimes experience the fight or flight response. This means our bodies gear up for a confrontation that sees a surge in adrenaline, muscle tension, increase heart rate, etc.

Of course, this came in handy when our ancestors were running away from sabre tooth tigers. But not so much today.

Most of us know that worry and stress aren't good for us. Chronic worry and emotional stress can trigger many health problems. Too much worrying and anxiety results in excessive hormone release which can spike blood sugar levels and blood fats. You can feel dizzy, suffer headaches and fatigue.

When the excessive fuel in the blood isn't used for physical activities, the chronic anxiety and stress hormones can have serious side effects such as a suppressed immune system, digestive disorders, and even heart issues.

The number of us who suffer from depression know these things all too well. I came out with it following a job loss and searching for work. Who wouldn't be depressed after such a thing?

One of the first symptoms of my anxiety was that famous heart flutter. It's not a heart flutter at all, but muscle spasms in the chest. Sure, if they're strong enough, it can feel like you're having a heart attack.

Our bodies are pretty cool little gizmos. We don't often notice what's going on inside, but believe me, millions of things every second keep us breathing, smiling, thinking and engaged. Even if we don't recognize a problem, our body does and tries to fight it.

Often, this conflict results in physical abnormalities. I see it like a pressure cooker, that slow-release valve that lets the steam out.

I find that in my case, it often blindsides me when I least expect. There's no one trigger or event, just a build-up over days or weeks.

My brain also compensates by giving me very vivid, if not odd, dreams on a nightly basis.

I also enjoy a glass of Crown Royal, but we know that's not the solution.

Every time the Bob Marley classic Three Little Birds comes on, it makes me smile and often stirs me to start wiggling. Hey, I'm past my jiving days. Here's his good advice:

?Don't worry about a thing?Cause every little thing gonna be all right ...?

Oh, how I long to get up every morning to the sound of tropical birds, ocean waves and breezes.

As strong as we seem on the surface, we are all fragile at times.

Mood and anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental health problems in Canada.

The number of Canadians who say they're experiencing high levels of anxiety has quadrupled since the pandemic began.

Sure, a lot of this is related to COVID-19, and an optimism is gaining ground with the majority of Canadians now being vaccinated. But recent travel restrictions and the unknown Omicron variant have thrown us another curve ball. Most of us just want to know when all of this will be over. More shots on the way?

Heading into the holidays, maybe we'll have a little more glee and become a bit more joyful and triumphant.

It's been a long time since families could share a special occasion together. This year will be an important one, indeed.

Our boats may be leaking a bit, but as long as we have an oar and part of a rudder, we can help each other steer.

There is strength in numbers and sharing the pain can help.

Whether you're an academic or hands-on fixer, head work is an entirely different realm.

Each person, and every brain, is as unique as each snowflake that lands on your eyelashes.

I've always found laughter is the best medicine and I have the laugh lines to prove it.

Sure, I laugh inappropriately at times, but again, it's that release valve letting out the steam. For those brief few seconds, or minutes of laughter, the weight slides off our shoulders; our woes seem less horrible and the sun peaks through the clouds.

I can't think of a more fitting piece of advice than from this tidbit from Regina Brett:

?Everything can change in the blink of an eye. But don't worry; God never blinks.?