

AS SEEN IN THE OCTOBER  
2013 ISSUE OF *O THE  
OPRAH MAGAZINE*



## The Worrier's *Survival Kit*

Are you a chronic catastrophizer? A frequent fretter? Join the club. This month, we're here to ease your troubled mind with strategies for fighting your greatest worries, true-life tales of survival, a look at history's most preposterous panics, and more.



## 6 Common Fears and How to Conquer Them for Good

If your hobby is spinning fretful fantasies of imminent disaster, give yourself a break. We've got the antidotes to your greatest fears and practical tools for unraveling those knots of unease.

### The Worrier's Survival Kit

Have you spent too much of your life standing at the corner of worry and angst? You're not alone. I worry that I'm going to spend my golden years broke and living on a park bench, that the funky mole on my husband's back isn't really benign, as his doctor keeps insisting. I worry about climate change, genetically modified foods and BPA in plastics. I worry because yesterday I couldn't think of the word that means skiing on water. ("Waterskiing," my son helpfully supplied.)

There's evidence that many people have brains a bit like mine—still abuzz in the wee hours with "What if...what if...no, seriously, *what if...*?" Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the United States, affecting 18 percent of the population, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. In the age of information overload and up-to-the-second Twitter feeds, it's not surprising that we feel constantly on high alert, says Friedemann Schaub, MD, PhD, author of *The Fear and Anxiety Solution*. "The constant barrage of news gives us every little detail of every disaster. Even though there may be nothing dangerous in our immediate environment, we still feel like something bad could also happen to us at any moment," he says.

To further complicate matters, this stuff is *supposed* to give us the jitters. "We're wired to pay attention to things that are scary," says Martin Rossman, MD, author of *The Worry Solution*. "The number one function of our brain is to keep us alive, so we worry as a way to anticipate possible dangers and problem-solve our way through them. All of us come from vigilant ancestors—if they hadn't been vigilant, they wouldn't have survived." Unfortunately, Rossman adds, we've gotten so good at worrying, we don't always know how to shut it off. The large-scale fears can get mixed in with the petty grievances, leaving us drowning in anxiety.

So how do you see your way clear? For starters, focus only on what you can control. "Instead of avoiding pain, uncertainty and heartbreak, we should embrace these emotions," says Steven Hayes, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. "They're fundamentally a part of what it means to be human."

—Beth Levine

From the October 2013 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*



