

Waiting and Uncertainty

INTOLERANCE OF UNCERTAINTY · COPING DURING WAITING PERIODS

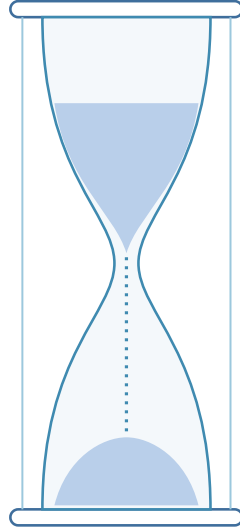
For the in-between times: test results, legal outcomes, job decisions and other unknowns

Waiting for important news is one of the most common, and most underestimated, stresses. Research suggests the wait itself can feel harder than hearing the news. You can't make the time pass faster, but you can shape how you get through it.

Out of my hands

like sand I can't hurry

- the result or decision —
- when the news arrives —
- other people's choices —
- what has already happened —



In my hands

what I do while it falls

- how I spend the waiting time
- sleep, food, movement, routine
- who I talk to, and what I ask
- a plan for each possible outcome
- how I respond to worry

I can't control the outcome.

I can choose how I spend the wait.

Returning to this line when worry spikes can help shift attention back to what's in your hands.

01 Sorting it out

my situation, in my own words

What I'm waiting for, and when I might hear

Out of my hands *to notice, and let be*

In my hands *to act on, one step at a time*

02 Worry or problem-solving?

a quick sorting question

Is this about a real problem I can act on now?

something specific, current and within my influence

YES

Problem-solve

- 1 Name the problem clearly
 - 2 List a few options, without judging them yet
 - 3 Choose one, and take a first small step
- e.g. "I haven't confirmed my appointment time."

Mine

NO: IT'S A "WHAT IF"

Make room, then return

- 1 Notice: "I'm having a what-if thought"
 - 2 Let it be there, without solving it; or save it for Worry Time
 - 3 Bring your attention back to what you were doing
- e.g. "What if it's the worst possible news?"

Mine

Coping With the Waiting Period

EVIDENCE-INFORMED STRATEGIES · MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

Practical options for tolerating not knowing, one day at a time

Difficulty tolerating uncertainty is thought to play a part across many forms of anxiety. The aim isn't to feel certain, but to make a little more room for not knowing.

03 The pull towards certainty

urges that promise relief, then keep worry going

- ☐ Checking my phone or email
 ☐ Searching online for answers
 ☐ Asking for reassurance
 ☐ Replaying conversations
 ☐ Imagining worst cases
 ☐ Trying to "read signs"

Checking and reassurance can bring brief relief, but often make the next wave of doubt stronger. Try delaying one urge a little longer each time, and notice what happens to the feeling.

04 Coping strategies to try

use what fits; none are required

Use absorbing activities

In studies of people awaiting exam and job results, being deeply absorbed ("in flow") was linked with less worry. Choose something just challenging enough, like a game, craft, sport or music. Passive scrolling rarely works as well.

Outline each outcome

A brief plan for welcome, difficult and delayed news can reduce repeated mental rehearsal. Once written, it can be set aside.

Acknowledge the difficulty

Naming the experience can reduce its pull: "Right now, I don't know. That's hard, and I can still do what matters today."

Maintain daily routines

Waiting can disrupt sleep and routine. Regular meals, movement, daylight and contact with people support mood and sleep.

05 If the news is...

written once, then set aside

What I'm hoping for

First step _____
Who I'll tell _____

Hard to hear

First step _____
Who I'll call _____

Delayed again

First step _____
Who I'll call _____

06 My waiting log

noticing patterns across the week

Day	Worry 0-10	Checking or reassurance	What absorbed me (fully)	A note to myself
Mon	/10	times		
Tue	/10	times		
Wed	/10	times		
Thu	/10	times		
Fri	/10	times		
Sat	/10	times		
Sun	/10	times		

If worry becomes overwhelming

If worry is starting to get in the way of daily life, it may help to talk it through with your psychologist.

To bring to my next session

SOURCES

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