

## HEARD BY THE EDITORS

**N**ew device reduces lung congestion, we hear from Sanjay Sethi, MD. The FDA has approved the Lung Flute, which can be used by people with *chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)* or asthma to help clear mucus from the airways. *How it works:* When the patient blows into the flute, sound waves travel down the airway, mobilizing mucus and making it easier to expel. The sound is inaudible, but patients see the reed flap and hear it hit the interior of the flute. The device should be used for five to 15 minutes twice daily. *If you suffer from COPD or asthma:* Ask your doctor about the Lung Flute. Some insurance providers will cover the \$45 cost.

Sanjay Sethi, MD, professor of medicine, University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, New York.

**C**herries fight gout flare-ups, we hear from Yuqing Zhang, DSc. Cherries have been shown to prevent gout from developing. *Now:* For the first time, research shows that eating 10 to 12 fresh cherries and/or drinking cherry extract daily lowers risk for gout flare-ups by 35%. *Theory:* Cherries are anti-inflammatory and reduce levels of *crystallized uric acid*, which can trigger a gout attack.

Yuqing Zhang, DSc, professor of medicine and epidemiology, Boston University School of Medicine.

**I**f a loved one has vision loss, be on the lookout for depression, we hear from Xinzhi Zhang, MD, PhD. *Recent finding:* Among 10,500 adults (average age 47), the rate of clinical depression among those with vision loss was 11.3%, compared with 4.8% for those with good eyesight. Depression was significantly higher in those with chronic conditions, such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and cataracts, and whose poor vision kept them from everyday activities, such as reading the newspaper, watching television and driving. *If your loved one has vision loss:* Encourage him/her to be screened for depression if symptoms develop.

Xinzhi Zhang, MD, PhD, senior epidemiologist, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

Robert L. Leahy, PhD  
Weill Medical College of Cornell University

## Worry No More!

5 simple steps to end those troubling thoughts and fears...



**P**eople who worry too much have a new problem to worry about. Chronic worriers suffer more from pain than those who are more laid-back. They're also more likely to have digestive complaints, fatigue and depression. In general, worriers are less likely to be happy and are at higher risk for relationship problems.

**Latest development:** Researchers now know that traditional psychotherapy and/or medications help only about 20% of chronic worriers. But 77% of patients who receive cognitive behavioral therapy, which helps patients recognize and change distorted thought patterns that fuel chronic worrying, experience significant reductions in their anxiety-related symptoms.

Fortunately, you can try many of these techniques on your own. If the problem persists after two months, you may want to consider getting professional help.\*

*How to overcome chronic worry...*

### STEP 1: WORRY IN IMAGES

Research shows that people who are anxious tend to have worried thoughts rather than form mental images of whatever troubles them.

**Reason:** Thoughts are less threatening than emotions, which often express themselves visually. People who worry get in the habit of using worry, with all the mental clutter that it causes, to avoid difficult emotions, such as sadness and anger.

\*To find a therapist near you who is trained in cognitive therapy, consult the Academy of Cognitive Therapy, [www.AcademyofCT.org](http://www.AcademyofCT.org).

**Action step:** The next time you're worried, form a visual image of the worst-case scenario. Someone who's worried about health, for example, might imagine lying in a hospital bed. At first, you'll probably notice that your worries *increase* when you visualize them. But with repetition, the image—and the worries behind it—will lose their sting. They'll start to seem mundane or even tedious—and you'll find it easier to let them go.

### STEP 2: CHALLENGE YOUR WORRIES

Worriers are actually good at solving real-life problems. The problem is that they spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about things that either will never happen, or that they'll handle well if they do come about. One study found that 85% of the things that people worried about eventually had positive—or at least neutral—outcomes.

Chronic worriers suffer from “cognitive distortions,” inaccurate thoughts about themselves or their daily lives. You might worry that you'll lose your job and think, *I'll never get another job if I lose this one*. But the truth is, you don't know that you won't get another job. You have no evidence of that.

**Action step:** The next time you have a thought like this, remind

*Bottom Line/Health* interviewed Robert L. Leahy, PhD, director of The American Institute for Cognitive Therapy and a clinical professor in psychiatry at Weill Medical College of Cornell University, both in New York City. He is also an associate editor of the *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy* and past-president of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies and the author of *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You* (Three Rivers). [www.CognitiveTherapyNYC.com](http://www.CognitiveTherapyNYC.com)





**CHARLES B. INLANDER**

## When Medical Tests Are Wrong



Several years ago, my doctor called to tell me that the results of my PSA test (which measures *prostate specific antigen* to identify possible prostate cancer) showed levels that were three times higher than normal. As images of my life insurance beneficiaries started to flash before my eyes, my doctor quickly suggested that I get retested because the result might have been a “false-positive” (that is, a mistaken finding of disease that is not present). I was retested at another lab, and the results were normal.

False-positive test results are more common than you might think. Over the course of a lifetime, one in four women will get at least one false alarm from a mammogram. Each year, about 3 million women will get Pap smear results suggesting an abnormality in their cells. Yet only one in 1,000 turns out to be malignant. Blood test results, including those for cholesterol, also can be inaccurate.

What often gets overlooked, however, is the fear and panic that patients suffer due to false-positive test results. According to a recent study, a woman’s anxiety and fear can equal that of someone who truly does have breast cancer. And those effects can last for up to three years. So what can you do to protect yourself or a loved one? *My advice...*

- **Aim for Monday or Tuesday.** When your doctor orders a test, try to schedule it early in the week. Results from the majority of widely used medical tests can be sent to your doctor within a day. Ask that he/she let you know the results promptly when they are received. If the results suggest a problem, your doctor can order a follow-up or retest by midweek. This eliminates the anxiety of waiting over the weekend or longer if you need to repeat the test or have other follow-up tests. *Helpful:* Many hospitals and testing facilities now provide prompt test results (for mammograms, CT scans and MRIs, for example) and follow-up testing if necessary. To save yourself both time and anxiety, check in your area for testing centers, hospitals and labs that offer such services.

- **Follow the rules.** Many false-positive results occur because patients don’t follow pretest instructions. Cholesterol test results may come back too high (in the danger zone) because the patient failed to fast 12 hours prior to the test. Other tests report inaccurate results because patients didn’t stop taking certain medications or supplements before the test. Ask your doctor to carefully go over what you should or shouldn’t do in the hours or day(s) before the test.

- **Try not to worry.** Sure, it is easier said than done, but remember, false-positive test results are common. When a test result suggests that something is wrong, do your best not to panic. By following the advice above, you can quickly determine if there really is a problem. And most importantly, don’t let false-positive test results stop you from getting the medical tests you need. I have continued to have my PSA checked and will do so until a better test comes along!

*Charles B. Inlander*

Charles B. Inlander is a consumer advocate and health-care consultant based in Fogelsville, Pennsylvania. He was the founding president of the nonprofit People’s Medical Society, a consumer advocacy organization credited with key improvements in the quality of US health care in the 1980s and 1990s, and is the author or coauthor of more than 20 consumer-health books. Please send comments and suggestions for future columns to Mr. Inlander in care of *Bottom Line/Health*, Box 10702, Stamford, CT 06904-0702...or via e-mail at [Inlander@BottomLineHealth.com](mailto:Inlander@BottomLineHealth.com).

yourself that there is nothing you can do to prevent your company from downsizing and that your odds of not getting laid off will improve if you are performing well in your job. If you also start networking, that will help you land a job if you are laid off.

### STEP 3: CLASSIFY YOUR WORRIES

People who worry *always* have a reason. They tell themselves that they’re more responsible than non-worriers. They anticipate what could go wrong. They obsess over details that (they think) will help them organize their lives. But worry that isn’t linked to action doesn’t solve anything. Productive worry is different because it helps you focus on what you can control.

**Action step:** Ask yourself if there’s something that you can do *today* that will address your worries. *Example:* I’m giving a workshop in Europe in a few weeks. If I’m worried about a hotel reservation, I can use my time productively by making sure that my room is booked.

Conversely, you can’t make an action plan for unproductive worries. I could agonize for weeks about the possibility that my talks won’t be well-received or that the participants won’t like me, but there’s nothing I can do about it beyond being well-prepared.

If you find yourself worrying about something that can’t be solved with an action you can put in a to-do list, then turn your attention to something else—ideally, something you enjoy doing, such as visiting a friend or playing a game.

### STEP 4: GIVE YOURSELF WORRY TIME

People often avoid this step because they want to worry less—not more. When done properly, however, it really is an effective way to stop negative thoughts from overtaking your life.

**Action step:** For at least two weeks, set aside just 30 minutes each day. During that time, write down *every* worry that comes into your mind. You might be surprised how short

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the list is. People tend to have the same worries, which they recycle over and over again.

Also spend your “worry time” challenging your thoughts. For example, ask yourself, *What am I predicting, and how likely is this to really happen? ... Is there any productive action I can take now? ... What advice would I give a friend?*

The rest of the day, do not give any mental energy to your worries. You’ll recognize that you’re worrying if your mind is filled with “what if” thoughts. When these thoughts come into your mind, focus on any productive action you can take. But for those two weeks, try to deal with worries *only* during your official worry time.

People who do this report that they feel a greater sense of control, and their worries gradually become less intrusive.

#### STEP 5: IDENTIFY DEEPER THREATS

The things that really worry you aren’t the harried thoughts that flit in and out of your brain. Worriers focus on minutiae in order to avoid their *core fears*—for example, the fear of abandonment or feeling inferior.

People who are afraid of failure might cope by working too much or being hyper-responsible. They worry excessively about their performance because, deep down, they feel that failure is imminent.

**Action step:** Ask yourself what you’re really afraid of. Then judge the *truth* of your belief. Worriers tend to think in all-or-nothing terms. In their minds, they’re either a complete failure or a complete success. This isn’t true of anyone. Everyone is a mix of good and bad.

**Remind yourself:** *I’m a human being with positive and negative qualities. I can appreciate myself even if I’m not perfect.*

And remember that there will always be matters that are beyond your control. Worrying about those issues won’t do any good. Take whatever steps you can to address the problem—then let it go! 🍏

Richard Besser, MD  
ABC News

## Don’t Rinse the Chicken...and Other Secrets to Avoiding Food Poisoning

**H**ere’s the dilemma: Kale, spinach and other leafy greens are some of the most healthful foods you can eat... but they also are among the most likely sources of food poisoning.

**A very real threat:** Every year, one in six Americans gets sick after eating contaminated foods. While the symptoms, including upset stomach, abdominal cramps, diarrhea and/or vomiting, usually are not life-threatening, about 3,000 people will *die* from the illness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

So how do you get the health benefits of vegetables, fruits and other common foods without running the risk of getting sick? *Here’s how you can minimize your risk...*

#### FRESH PRODUCE

Vegetables account for about one-third of all cases of food poisoning in the US, and leafy greens, such as spinach, lettuce and kale, are the highest-risk produce. That’s because leafy greens grow close to the ground and are easily contaminated from irrigation water and livestock runoff. Leafy greens also have shapes and textures that make them harder to clean than other types of produce.

**Important:** Bagged and prewashed lettuce mixes may be somewhat riskier than “whole” produce because multiple heads of lettuce are used



and mixes are handled more during processing. To minimize risk...

- **Get a package from the back of the store’s refrigerator** when buying pre-cut lettuce. The colder temperature in this location inhibits bacterial growth.

- **Check the expiration date.** While most

people are careful to check the expiration date on dairy, that’s not always the case for produce. Packaged fresh produce that’s eaten at least five days before the “sell by” date is less likely to cause food poisoning than older produce.

Rinsing produce, including pre-washed lettuces, will remove *some* harmful organisms, but not all of them. In addition to rinsing, buy the freshest produce possible, keep it refrigerated and, if possible, cook it thoroughly to kill any bacteria.

#### POULTRY

Most Americans wouldn’t think of preparing a chicken or turkey without rinsing the bird first. The common belief is that rinsing washes away *Salmonella* or other disease-causing microbes. In fact, rinsing poultry is the *worst* thing

*Bottom Line/Health* interviewed Richard Besser, MD, chief health and medical editor of ABC News. He has served as the acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and managed the CDC’s public health emergency preparedness and emergency response activities. He is also the author of *Tell Me the Truth, Doctor: Easy-to-Understand Answers to Your Most Confusing and Critical Health Questions* (Hyperion).

