

How To Stop Obsessing Over A Dark Secret (M)

Dark secrets really do feel like a physical weight pulling downwards — here's how to get rid of them.

Carrying around a secret is like carrying around a physical weight, a study finds.

It could be money troubles, bad habits or personal quirks.

Whatever it is, the psychological weight on your mind could be holding you back, says Dr Michael Slepian, the study's author:

“The more you feel preoccupied by a secret and are thinking about it, the more you are using your personal resources — cognitive and motivational — the less energy you feel you have available to pursue other tasks.

You see things around you as more challenging.

It's the same outcome as when you are carrying a heavy burden.

The burden of a secret can lead people to withdraw from their social lives and even perform worse at work, Dr Slepian says:

“Being preoccupied by a secret at work can be demotivating, and we know if you are less motivated, you perform less well.”

Talk to someone

Across a series of studies Dr Slepian and colleagues looked at how keeping a secret feels and how to feel better about it.

The studies showed that people really do feel secrets like a weight bearing down on them ([Slepian et al., 2015](#)).

The best way to get rid of the burden is to talk to someone about it.

Whether it's a confidant, an anonymous hotline, or even an anonymous website like [PostSecret](#), sharing lessens the burden.

People tend to feel very relieved when they tell another person.

Plus, opening up about a secret seems to help people process it.

Dr Slepian said:

“When you talk about your secret, you start thinking about it constructively — processing it, making sense of it, learning how to cope with it — reducing your preoccupation with that secret and taking you off the path of burden.”