**Health Anxiety**

**Health anxiety is when you spend so much time worrying you're ill, or going to get ill, that it starts to take over your life. It's related to obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).**

**Check if you have health anxiety**

You may have health anxiety if you:

* constantly worry about your health
* frequently check your body for signs of illness, such as lumps, tingling or pain
* are always asking people for reassurance that you're not ill
* worry that a doctor or medical tests may have missed something
* obsessively look at health information on the internet or in the media
* avoid anything to do with serious illness, such as medical TV programmes
* act as if you were ill (for example, avoiding physical activities)

Anxiety itself can cause symptoms like headaches or a racing heartbeat, and you may mistake these for signs of illness.

**Self-help for health anxiety**

**Keep a diary**

* Note how often you check your body, ask people for reassurance, or look at health information.
* Try to gradually reduce how often you do these things over a week.

**Challenge your thoughts**

* Draw a table with 2 columns.
* Write your health worries in the 1st column, then more balanced thoughts in the 2nd. For example, in the 1st column you may write, "I'm worried about these headaches" and in the 2nd, "Headaches can often be a sign of stress".

**Keep busy with other things**

* When you get the urge to check your body, for example, distract yourself by going for a walk or calling a friend.

**Get back to normal activities**

* Try to gradually start doing things you've been avoiding because of your health worries, such as sports or socialising.

**Try to relax:**

* Try [breathing exercises for stress](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/) or visit the [Mind website for some relaxation exercises](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-exercises/).
* your worries about your health are preventing you leading a normal life
* self-help is not working

**Treatment for health anxiety**

If a GP diagnoses you with health anxiety, they may refer you for a talking therapy, such as [cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/), or offer you a medicine for anxiety.

You can refer yourself directly to an NHS talking therapies service without a referral from a GP.

[**Find an NHS talking therapies service**](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/)

If you can afford it, you can choose to pay for your therapy privately. The cost of private therapy sessions varies, but it can cost from £35 upwards per session.

Free therapy or low-cost sessions starting at £15 are sometimes available. Find out more from these charities:

* [Mind: How to find therapy or counselling](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/how-to-find-a-therapist/)
* [Anxiety UK: Therapy services](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/access-therapy/)

[The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies has a register of all accredited therapists in the UK](https://babcp.com/CBTRegister/Search#/), and [The British Psychological Society has a directory of chartered psychologies](https://www.bps.org.uk/public/find-psychologist), some of whom specialise in CBT.

**More help for mental health**

* Read more about getting help for [anxiety, fear and panic](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anxiety-fear-panic/).
* [The mental health charity Mind has information on anxiety and panic attacks](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/self-care/).

[Health anxiety - NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/health-anxiety/)

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Page last reviewed: 8 November 2023  
Next review due: 8 November 2026