

Exercise

Professional Version | US English

Am I Experiencing Health Anxiety?



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Description

Health anxiety (also referred to as illness anxiety disorder and hypochondriasis) is a condition characterized by preoccupation with or fear about the possibility of having a serious, progressive or life-threatening illness, accompanied by either repetitive and excessive health-related behaviors. It is experienced by between 1 and 10 people out of every 100 (Stansfield et al, 2016; Kessler et al, 2005) but like many anxiety disorders, it is under-diagnosed and often goes unrecognized (Olatunji et al, 2014).

The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for illness anxiety disorder include:

- A preoccupation with having or acquiring a serious illness.
- The absence of somatic symptoms (or if present, they are only mild in intensity). If another medical condition is present, or there is a high risk for developing a medical condition, the preoccupation is clearly excessive or disproportionate.
- A high level of anxiety about health, and the individual is easily alarmed about their personal health status.
- The performance of excessive health-related behaviors (e.g. repeatedly checking one's body for signs of illness) or maladaptive avoidance (e.g. avoiding doctor's appointments or hospitals).
- Illness preoccupation that has been present for at least 6 months (although the specific illness that is feared may have changed over time).

The ICD-11 diagnostic criteria for hypochondriasis include:

- Persistent preoccupation or fear about the possibility of having one or more serious, progressive, or life-threatening illnesses.
- Preoccupation which is accompanied by either:
 - Repetitive and excessive health-related behaviors, such as repeatedly checking of the body for evidence of illness, spending inordinate amounts of time researching the feared illness, or repeatedly seeking reassurance (e.g. by arranging multiple medical consultations).
 - Maladaptive avoidance behavior related to health (e.g. avoiding medical appointments).
- Symptoms that result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning. If functioning is maintained, it is only through significant effort.

Am I Experiencing Health Anxiety? is an indicative screening tool, designed to help clients self-assess whether their experiences might warrant further investigation. It is not intended to give a formal diagnosis or provide a measure of severity.

Instructions

Suggested Question



Some people who report similar experiences to yours have a condition called health anxiety. Would you like to try a short quiz that could give us an idea of whether this problem troubles you?

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).

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Am I Experiencing Health Anxiety?

Health anxiety should only be diagnosed by a mental health professional or a doctor. However, answering the questions below can give you an idea of whether you might find it helpful to have a professional assessment.

Are you concerned that you might have a serious illness or disease that doctors have not found?

☐ Not at all

☐ A little bit

☐ Quite a lot

☐ Very much

How much time do you spend worrying about your health?

☐ Never

☐ Occasionally

☐ Much of my time

☐ Most of my time

How often are you afraid that you have a serious illness?

☐ Never

☐ Occasionally

☐ Much of my time

☐ Most of my time

How relieved do you feel when a doctor tells you there is nothing wrong?

☐ Lastingly relieved

☐ Initially relieved, but
worries return later

☐ Initially relieved, but
worries always return

☐ Not relieved

Do you have difficulty taking your mind off things about your health?

☐ Not at all

☐ A little bit

☐ Quite a lot

☐ Very much

The questions above can't provide a definitive diagnosis, but if you ticked the rightmost box to lots of these questions, you might be experiencing health anxiety.

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