**THE WORRIED WELL**

**Hypochondriacs listen up! Worrying about your health ‘DOUBLES your risk of heart attack’**

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4th November 2016, 8:38 am

Researchers found the “worried well” suffer so much anxiety it strains the heart

**HEALTHY people who worry about being ill almost double their risk of heart disease, a study reveals.**

Researchers found the “worried well” suffer so much [anxiety](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/health/1970073/symptoms-anxiety-zayn-malik-will-young/) that it places a strain on their heart.

This can lead to heart attack, chest pain or heart failure.

General stress is already known to increase the risk of [heart disease](https://www.thesun.co.uk/topic/heart-disease/).

But experts from Sandviken University Hospital, in Bergen, Norway, say health anxiety might have its own role.

Affected people obsessively worry that they have – or [may develop – a serious illness](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1815840/men-suffering-anxiety-are-twice-as-likely-to-die-from-cancer/) despite tests showing there is nothing wrong.

The academics analysed data for more than 7,000 born between 1953 and 1957.

Those who had health anxiety at the start of the study were 73 per cent more likely to develop heart disease than those who did not.

And the higher the [anxiety](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1932450/signs-and-symptoms-that-you-may-be-suffering-anxiety-like-zayn-malik-olly-murs-and-selena-gomez/), the greater was the risk.

The participants filled in two questionnaires about their health, lifestyle, and educational attainment.

And they had a physical check-up, consisting of blood tests, weight, height, and blood pressure measurements, taken between 1997 and 1999.

The heart health of all the participants was then tracked up to the end of 2009.

A total of 234 people had a [heart attack](https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1910899/teen-footballer-who-suffered-fabrice-muamba-style-heart-attack-playing-for-tottenham-hotspur-awarded-7-million-payout/) or bout of acute angina during the monitoring period.

But the proportion of those suffering heart disease was twice as high among those who displayed health anxiety (3 per cent) than those who did not (6 per cent).

Established risk factors, such as drinking, smoking, and exercise accounted for some of this difference but not all of it.

Researcher Line Iden Berge, from the hospital, said: “This finding is of public health significance as heart disease is one of the main causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide.

“If persons with high levels of health anxiety stay alert with the intention to better ‘control’ and ‘detect’ early signs of severe diseases, it might contribute to unintentional harmful effects.

“These findings illustrate the dilemma for clinicians between reassuring the patient that current physical symptoms of anxiety do not represent heart disease, contrasted against the emerging knowledge on how anxiety, over time, may be causally associated with [increased risk of heart disease](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1874939/heart-attack-test/).

“At best, this finding might encourage patients to seek treatment for health anxiety and to trust their heart.”

Emily Reeve, from the British Heart Foundation, said: “It’s natural for people to worry if they feel they might be unwell.

“But anxiety and stress can trigger [unhealthy habits, such as smoking](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1885317/what-happens-to-your-body-when-you-quit-smoking-we-reveal-the-health-benefits-after-20-minutes-a-year-and-a-decade/) or eating badly, which put you at greater risk of heart disease.

“While we don’t know if the ‘worried well’ are directly putting themselves at risk of a heart attack, it’s clear that reducing unnecessary anxiety can have health benefits.

“If you are experiencing health anxiety, speak to your doctor.”

The study is published in the journal BMJ Open.