

Hypochondria - health anxiety

Health anxiety is sometimes called hypochondria.

This is when you spend so much time worrying you're ill, or about getting ill, that it starts to take over your life.

Signs of health anxiety

You may have health anxiety if you:

- worry about your health most of the time
- 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 your 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. You may mistake these for signs of illness.

Self-help for health anxiety

Here are some self-help tips to help you with 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 first column, then more balanced thoughts in the second.

For example, in the first column you might write: "I'm worried about these headaches."

In the second you might write: "Headaches can often be a sign of stress."

Keep busy with other things

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

You could also try these relaxation techniques:

- [breathing exercises](#)
- [mindfulness](#)

Get back to normal activities

Try to gradually start doing things you've been avoiding, such as sports or socialising.

See your GP

See a GP if your worries are preventing you leading a normal life and self-help is not working.

If your GP diagnoses you with health anxiety, they may:

- refer you for [talking therapies](#)
- discuss anxiety medicines with you

You can also refer yourself for psychological therapy.

[Anxiety - tips and self-help](#)

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