

UWE Wellbeing Service

Health Anxiety

Do you worry a lot of the time about your health? Does this pre-occupy your thoughts and prevent you from getting on with other things?

We all worry about our health from time to time and that can help us to develop healthy lifestyles. It is also important that we take our concerns to our GP to be assessed by a medical expert. However, sometimes that worry can become so severe and so frequent that it gets in the way of us enjoying a normal life. Sometimes it is hard not to worry even when our GP has reassured us.

This is when normal concern about our health can become health anxiety.

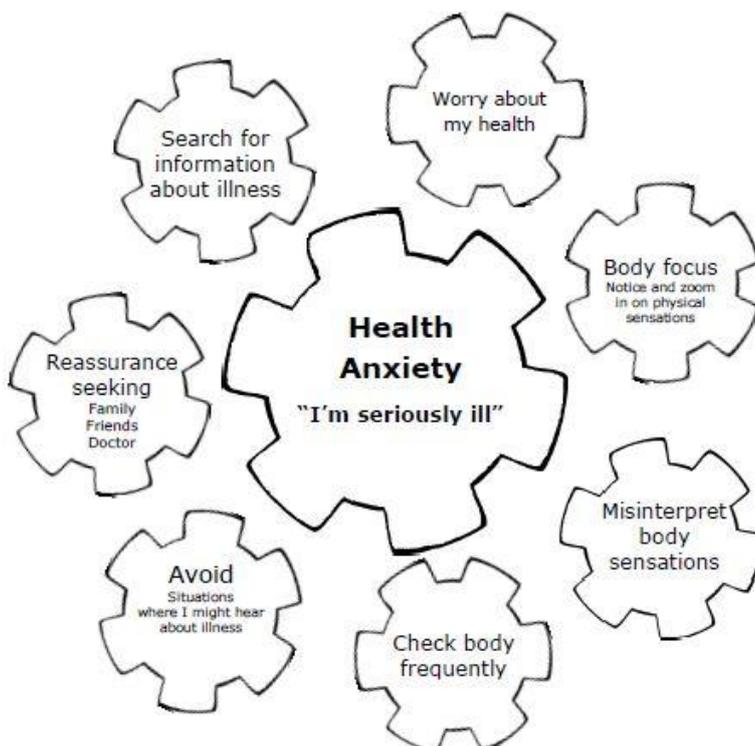
Health anxiety (sometimes called hypochondria) can affect and dominate every aspect of our lives:

Behaviour – frequent checking of our bodies for physical symptoms, regular searching of the internet to prove or disprove what we think we have found seeking reassurance from others, avoiding things we believe might be too risky or beyond us.

Thoughts – anxious beliefs about our symptoms and often assumptions about how they will become worse, permanent or untreatable.

Emotions – perhaps fear, sadness, anxiety, frustration or anger

Physically – perhaps fatigue, low energy, tension, poor sleep or low appetite.



All these “cogs” help to keep the anxiety going in a cycle that feeds off itself.

Inevitably the more you check for symptoms the more you find, the more anxious thoughts you have and the more frightened you feel. The internet is never short of “experts” offering opinions and advice on any issue.

But it is possible to challenge this cycle so that you can conquer your health anxiety and start to enjoy the life you want to live.

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UWE library

- Willson, Rob; Veale, David (2009) **Overcoming health anxiety**; a self-help guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques [Frenchay, Glenside](#)
- Understanding how health anxiety develops and is maintained
- Practical ways of improving health anxiety based on clinically-proven CBT approaches

Websites

- **NHS** – a useful short guide explaining what health anxiety is and practical things you can do to overcome it. <https://tinyurl.com/yctdoagn> You can also get it (along with many other excellent NHS guides to a range of issues) as an app called “Self Help” for Android or iPhone

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=pic2.uk.nhs.ntw&hl=en_GB

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/self-help/id648874696?mt=8>
- **NHS** – another very good practical guide to getting your health anxiety under control and your life back <https://tinyurl.com/p4jy93n>
- **CCI website** - an excellent free, online support – detailed modules on development of health anxiety and ways of tackling it <https://tinyurl.com/oksr3xx>
- **Get Self Help website** - another useful and popular introduction to understanding and challenging health anxiety <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/healthanxiety.htm>

Online videos

- **Living with health anxiety**: a personal video by Catherine Mitchell talking about how health anxiety was ruining her life and how she overcame it using CBT therapy and was able to reclaim her life and get back to university. **As she says at the end – when times are tough you can either let things ruin your life or you can choose to take control!**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-AIRXuZqQs>
- **What is health anxiety?** A very short video from Anxiety United that also includes some ideas to start taking back control. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMyI7IrsIvQ>