

Health Anxiety

Understanding symptom monitoring, catastrophic interpretation, reassurance, and checking.

What health anxiety can involve

Health anxiety is persistent fear about illness that may involve body scanning, internet searching, repeated reassurance, frequent checking, or difficulty trusting normal medical evaluation. This handout does not suggest ignoring new or concerning symptoms.

The checking cycle

- A sensation is noticed.
- The mind interprets it as evidence of serious illness.
- Anxiety increases attention to the body.
- Checking or reassurance briefly lowers anxiety.
- Uncertainty returns, leading to more monitoring.

Skills that can help

- Use appropriate medical care while reducing repetitive checking beyond the agreed plan.
- Limit symptom searching when it predictably escalates anxiety.
- Notice the difference between “possible” and “probable.”
- Practice allowing some uncertainty rather than seeking impossible 100% reassurance.
- Return attention to normal activity after reasonable medical action has been taken.

Try this reflection

Which reassurance behavior helps for only a short time and then needs to be repeated?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.