

Resources for health anxiety – patients and clinicians

An introductory video for patients

You tube video on health anxiety 10-minute CBT available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc5yyPhc48g>

Screening tool

A brief screening tool for health anxiety, such as the Bodily Preoccupation Scale of the Illness Attitude Scales can help to identify those with severe health anxiety. Ask the patient to respond to the questions below using options “No,” “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Most of the time”

1. When you read or hear about an illness, do you get symptoms similar to those of the illness?
2. When you notice a sensation in your body, do you find it difficult to think of something else?
3. When you feel a sensation in your body do you worry about it?

Scoring and interpretation

- No = 0, Rarely = 1, Sometimes = 2, Often = 3, Most of the time = 4 (total scale range 0-12).
- A score of ≥ 6 discriminates severe health anxiety from the general population with 92% sensitivity and 90% specificity

Many people with health anxiety have a comorbid mental health problem, summarised below. If you identify an additional mental health problem, discuss which is causing most distress and which the patient would like to address first.

Differential diagnosis of health anxiety:

- *Health anxiety* — Excessive worry about health that leads to functional impairment
- *Generalised anxiety disorder* — Worry in several domains (such as financial or job-related worry)
- *Obsessive-compulsive disorder* — Rituals in response to intrusive thoughts dominate the clinical picture
- *Panic disorder* — Recurrent acute panic attacks
- *Medically unexplained symptoms*—Symptoms (such as pain or tremor) are the main problem, whereas in health anxiety it is the fear of serious disease

Resources: <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder/diagnosis/diagnosis/>

Wilson R and Veale D *Overcoming Health Anxiety Second Edition : A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques*. Published by Robinson ISBN 978 1472146601