

Understanding health anxiety

Health anxiety is when you spend so much time worrying that you are unwell, or about to become unwell, that it starts to take over your life.

As COVID-19 continues to gain momentum across the globe, it is understandable that individuals may be feeling increasingly anxious about their health.

The continuous media coverage, as well as the many personal stories and experiences shared on social media, are to be expected during times of a major event. While most people will experience some level of anxiety, it becomes problematic when it impacts our day-to-day thoughts and actions.

What are the signs of health anxiety?

Anxiety itself can cause symptoms such as headaches or a racing heartbeat which may then be mistaken for signs of illness.

- ◆ Constantly worrying about your health
- ◆ Frequently checking for signs and symptoms such as taking your temperature
- ◆ Asking others for reassurance that you are not unwell
- ◆ Looking obsessively at health information on social media or in news articles
- ◆ Acting as if you were unwell by avoiding certain activities or going out in public places

Self-help strategies

- ◆ **Keep a diary** – note how frequently you check yourself for symptoms, ask others for reassurance or look at health information. Try to gradually reduce the frequency
- ◆ **Write down your concerns** – find some quiet time and write down each your health concerns. Next to each one, then write down a more balanced thought about each concern
- ◆ **Return to normal activities** – gradually start doing things you may have stopped, as long as it is safe to do so
- ◆ **Practice good hygiene** – ensure you are following all of the identified hygiene practices
- ◆ **Keep busy with other activities** – each time you find yourself looking to check on your systems try to distract yourself with another activity such as going for a walk
- ◆ **Switch off** – it can be easy to get addicted to monitoring the news and social media every few minutes. Try to limit your exposure and only view reputable information
- ◆ **Practice relaxation strategies** – make sure you are getting sufficient rest, and draw on practices such as mindfulness or breathing exercises
- ◆ **Reach out for help** – if you are concerned talk with your GP, a trusted friend or call your EAP