



What is Health Anxiety?

If you have Health anxiety, you will be preoccupied with concerns about your health and fears of having or developing a serious health condition. This anxiety exists in spite of medical professionals having ruled out a medical diagnosis. You may have found that the anxiety has become so intense and chronic, you spend many hours checking for symptoms, repeatedly making GP appointments, seeking reassurance from medical professionals, family and friends and surfing the internet for information about your feared illness. Despite all of these attempts at reassurance, you're likely to remain convinced that you have a serious health problem that has been missed or over-looked. The chances are that you'll therefore continue to focus on symptoms, checking and scanning your body, seeking reassurance and possibly avoiding Doctors and having to confront medical information on TV or in books. This generates more worries and keeps your health anxiety going.

Can treatment help?

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is the evidence-based treatment for Health Anxiety. Brief, focused CBT can be highly effective although depending on the severity of the Health Anxiety, longer treatment may sometimes be required.

CBT Assessment and Key Treatment Strategies:

Bristol CBT Clinic invites young people (and if indicated, their parents / carers) to complete a number of standardized questionnaires. These questionnaires assess the severity of the health anxiety, how it impacts on daily life, what thoughts and beliefs are associated with the problem and an assessment of other difficulties. Following the assessment, treatment may focus on the following:

- Engaging the young person in therapy and developing a shared understanding of the Health Anxiety and what is currently maintaining it.
- Working together to agree goals for treatment
- With the support of the therapist, setting up a series of experiments to encourage the young person to discover for themselves the short- and long-term effects of checking, scanning, reassurance seeking, medical visits and avoidance.
- Working to develop a range of skills to reduce the preoccupation with illness and to regain quality of life.
- Agreeing a coping plan focused on how to maintain progress once the CBT sessions have ended.