

Belfast Cbt Services

Cbt for Health Anxiety

Hypochondriasis or hypochondria (sometimes referred to as health phobia or health anxiety) refers to excessive preoccupation or worry about having a serious illness. This debilitating condition is the result of an inaccurate perception of the body's condition despite the absence of an actual medical condition.[1] An individual suffering from hypochondriasis is known as a hypochondriac. Hypochondriacs become unduly alarmed about any physical symptoms they detect, no matter how minor the symptom may be. They are convinced that they have or are about to be diagnosed with a serious illness.[2] Even sounds produced by organs in the body, such as those made by the intestines, seem like symptoms of a very serious illness to patients dealing with hypochondriasis.[3] Often, hypochondria persists even after a physician has evaluated a person and reassured them that their concerns about symptoms do not have an underlying medical basis or, if there is a medical illness, their concerns are far in excess of what is appropriate for the level of disease. Many hypochondriacs focus on a particular symptom as the catalyst of their worrying, such as gastro-intestinal problems, palpitations, or muscle fatigue. The duration of these symptoms and preoccupation is 6 months or longer.[4]

The DSM-IV-TR defines this disorder, "Hypochondriasis," as a somatoform disorder[5] and one study has shown it to affect about 3% of the visitors to primary care settings.[6]

Hypochondria is often characterized by fears that minor bodily symptoms may indicate a serious illness, constant self-examination and self-diagnosis, and a preoccupation with one's body. Many individuals with hypochondriasis express doubt and disbelief in the doctors' diagnosis, and report that doctors' reassurance about an absence of a serious medical condition is unconvincing, or short-lasting. Additionally, many hypochondriacs experience elevated blood pressure, stress, and anxiety in the presence of doctors or while occupying a medical facility, a condition known as "white coat syndrome." Many hypochondriacs require constant reassurance, either from doctors, family, or friends, and the disorder can become a disabling torment for the individual with hypochondriasis, as well as his or her family and friends. Some hypochondriacal individuals completely avoid any reminder of illness, whereas others frequently visit doctors' surgeries. Other hypochondriacs will never speak about their terror, convinced that their fear of having a serious illness will not be taken seriously by those in whom they confide.

Treatment for Health Anxiety

Common to the different approaches to the treatment of hypochondriasis is the effort to help each patient find a better way to overcome the way his/her medically unexplained symptoms and illness concerns rule her/his life. Current research makes clear that this excessive worry can be helped by either appropriate medicine or targeted psychotherapy.

Recent scientific studies have shown that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs; e.g., fluoxetine and paroxetine) are effective treatment options for hypochondriasis as demonstrated in clinical trials.[14][15][16][17][18] CBT, a talking therapy, helps the worrier to address and cope with bothersome physical symptoms and illness worries and is found helpful in reducing the intensity and frequency of troubling bodily symptoms. SSRIs can reduce obsessive worry through adjusting neurotransmitter levels and have been shown to be effective as treatments for anxiety and depression as well as for hypochondriasis. Wikipaedia, November-2012]"

ken Walsh
Belfast Cbt Services
75 Wynchurch Road
Rosetta Belfast
Bt6 0JJ

Landline 02890797210
Mobile 07740861113
Email - kenwalsh@belfastcbtserives.co.uk
Website www.belfastcbtserives.co.uk