

Hypochondria

Introduction

Hypochondria is a constant fear that you have a serious health problem. You may think that normal sensations from your body are signs of an illness if you have hypochondria. Hypochondria is also called hypochondriasis.

Hypochondria may make it hard to do normal activities. If left untreated, it can lead to problems like anxiety, depression and substance abuse.

This reference summary explains hypochondria. It talks about the symptoms and causes of the disorder. It also explains how hypochondria is diagnosed and treated.



Hypochondria

Hypochondria is a mental health condition that causes you to fear that you have serious health problems. You may think that normal sensations from your body are signs of an illness. Everyone worries about their health sometimes. But people with hypochondria may have trouble controlling this fear. Hypochondria may make it hard to do normal activities.

People with hypochondria worry about disease and illness even when nothing is wrong. They may think a normal body sensation is a symptom of a disease. For example, someone with hypochondria may feel anxious if their leg falls asleep. They may think it is a sign of a bigger problem.



People with hypochondria do not lie about the physical symptoms that they have. They believe that their feelings or symptoms are signs of a disease or another problem.

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People with hypochondria may obsess over their symptoms. They may ask friends, family members or health care providers about their symptoms for comfort. But this rarely stops the worrying. Hypochondria is often a long-term disorder. People with hypochondria usually worry about a disease or symptoms for at least 6 months.

Symptoms

The main symptom of hypochondria is an intense fear that something is wrong with your body. You may worry that you have a serious disease or health condition. You may think that normal feelings or sensations are signs of an illness.

If you have hypochondria, you may:

- Constantly talk about your symptoms with friends or family.
- Do a lot of research on diseases.
- Switch health care providers often.

If you have hypochondria, you may also:

- Not believe a health care provider who tells you that nothing is wrong.
- Ask for certain tests like x-rays to help diagnose a problem.

Other symptoms of hypochondria include:

- Constantly checking your body for problems.
- Frequently checking your blood pressure or pulse.
- Thinking you have a disease once you learn about it.

If left untreated, hypochondria can lead to other problems. These may include:

- Anxiety disorders.
- Depression.
- Health problems from exams or surgeries that were not needed.
- Substance abuse.



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Causes

The cause of hypochondria is often not known. Hypochondria often happens along with another mental health disorder, such as generalized anxiety disorder or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Generalized anxiety disorder is constant anxiety that is not related to a specific event or situation. Obsessive-compulsive disorder is an anxiety disorder that causes repeated and upsetting thoughts. People may try to control these thoughts by performing certain actions over and over again.

Anyone can have hypochondria. But it is more common in adults than children. People are more likely to have the disorder if they have family members with hypochondria.

Having a serious childhood illness may cause people to worry about disease later in life. This can lead to obsessive behaviors and cause hypochondria. Sexual or physical abuse as a child may also lead to hypochondria as an adult. Sometimes stressful events can cause hypochondria. These events could be a new job or the death of a friend or family member.



Diagnosis

Your health care provider will ask questions about your personal and family medical history. They will perform a physical exam. If your health care provider thinks your symptoms may be related to a health condition, he or she may order other exams.

Your health care provider will ask you questions about your fears and your symptoms. You may be asked to fill out a psychological questionnaire. This is a list of questions used to help diagnose certain mental health disorders.

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To be diagnosed with hypochondria, you must meet the following conditions:

- You have worried about a serious illness for at least 6 months.
- You worry about the level of your anxiety.
- Your worrying causes problems with your normal activities.

Your health care provider may try to diagnose other mental health disorders. These disorders can include depression, generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder.



Treatment

Hypochondria may be hard to treat. But symptoms can get better with treatment. Hypochondria is typically treated with a combination of medication and counseling.

You and your health care provider may decide to treat hypochondria with medication. He or she may prescribe an antidepressant. Antidepressant medications are usually used to treat depression. But they can also help with symptoms of anxiety and panic. Taking antidepressants may help you feel less afraid of having a disease or health condition.

Antidepressants are usually taken daily. It may take 2 weeks to 2 months to benefit from antidepressants. They are usually not addictive.

Therapy is also used to treat hypochondria. The most common therapy used for hypochondria is called cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT. It is a common type of mental health counseling. CBT can help you:

- Learn about your condition.
- Focus on your feelings, thoughts, moods and behaviors.
- Identify certain thought patterns that may cause anxiety.
- Understand why you may fear certain symptoms or diseases.



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CBT can also help teach you healthy behaviors. Your therapist may gradually help you avoid certain actions or behaviors that increase your worrying.

Exercise and a healthy diet can help ease depression and anxiety that may be caused by hypochondria. Do not use drugs or alcohol if you have hypochondria. These substances may make your condition worse.

Summary

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The cause of hypochondria is often not known. It often happens with another mental health disorder, such as generalized anxiety disorder or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

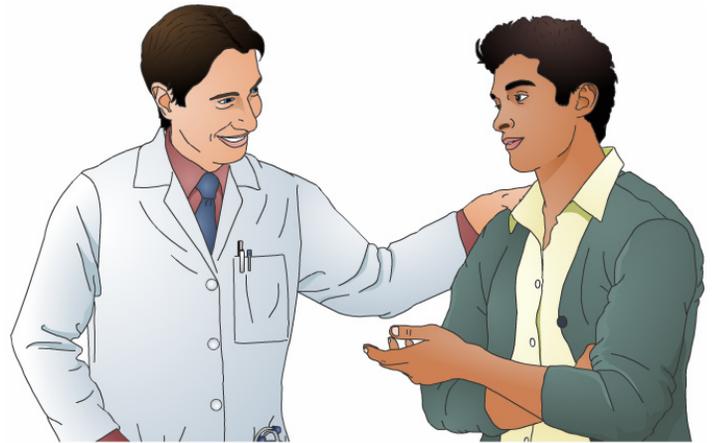
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Your health care provider may prescribe an antidepressant. Therapy is also used to treat hypochondria. The most common therapy used for hypochondria is called cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT. It is a common type of mental health counseling.

Exercise and a healthy diet can help ease depression and anxiety that may be caused by hypochondria. Do not use drugs or alcohol if you have hypochondria. These substances may make your condition worse.



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