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Health Anxiety Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

1 · Self-Assessment

2 · Where Do Your Health Worries Come From?

3 · Identify Your Health Worries

4 · Understand Your Health Anxiety Cycle

5 · Identify Underlying Beliefs

6 · Downward Arrow

7 · Challenge Your Health Worries

8 · Safety Behavior

9 · Schedule Worry Time

10 · Keep a Worry Journal

11 · Coping Skills

12 · Practice Self-Compassion

How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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Self-Assessment

Health anxiety, also known as illness anxiety disorder (previously called hypochondriasis), is a condition characterized by excessive worry and fear about having a serious medical condition, despite having little or no actual medical evidence to support the belief.

The following are common signs you might be struggling with health anxiety. Rate each statement on a scale from 1-5 (1 being “almost never” and 5 being “always”):

Statement	Rate (1-5)
1. “I constantly worry about having a serious medical condition.”	1-2-3-4-5
2. “I frequently check my body for signs or symptoms of illness.”	1-2-3-4-5
3. “Minor physical sensations or changes in my body often make me feel anxious.”	1-2-3-4-5
4. “I spend a lot of time researching symptoms and illnesses online.”	1-2-3-4-5
5. “I often seek reassurance from doctors, even after being told there is no evidence of a serious medical condition.”	1-2-3-4-5
6. “My fear of illness interferes with my daily life, such as work, relationships, or social activities.”	1-2-3-4-5
7. “I am frequently preoccupied with my health, causing significant distress and anxiety.”	1-2-3-4-5

Score: ____/35

The score reflects the severity and impact of your health anxiety.

Where Do Your Health Worries Come From?

1. When did you first notice these health worries? Were there any significant life events or changes around the same time your health worries started?

2. Consider your family history. Are there any significant health concerns or experiences that have influenced your own worries?

3. Reflect on your upbringing. Were there any specific messages or beliefs about illness and health that you were exposed to?

4. Think about your past experiences with illness or medical issues. Were there any specific incidents that triggered or intensified your health worries?

5. Have you had any negative experiences with healthcare professionals in the past that might contribute to your current concerns?

6. Explore any underlying fears or stressors that may be fueling your health worries. Are there any broader fears related to control, uncertainty, or mortality?

Identify Your Health Worries

Symptom	Worried Thoughts	Impact
<i>e.g. Chest pain</i>	<i>"I often experience chest pain, which means I must have heart disease."</i>	<i>Difficulty focusing on tasks or enjoying daily activities due to preoccupation with health concerns.</i>

Understand Your Health Anxiety Cycle

By understanding how your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors interact in a cycle, you can begin to identify moments where you can intervene and disrupt the cycle when it becomes unhelpful.

1. Trigger: You notice a minor physical symptom, such as a slight headache or a racing heart.

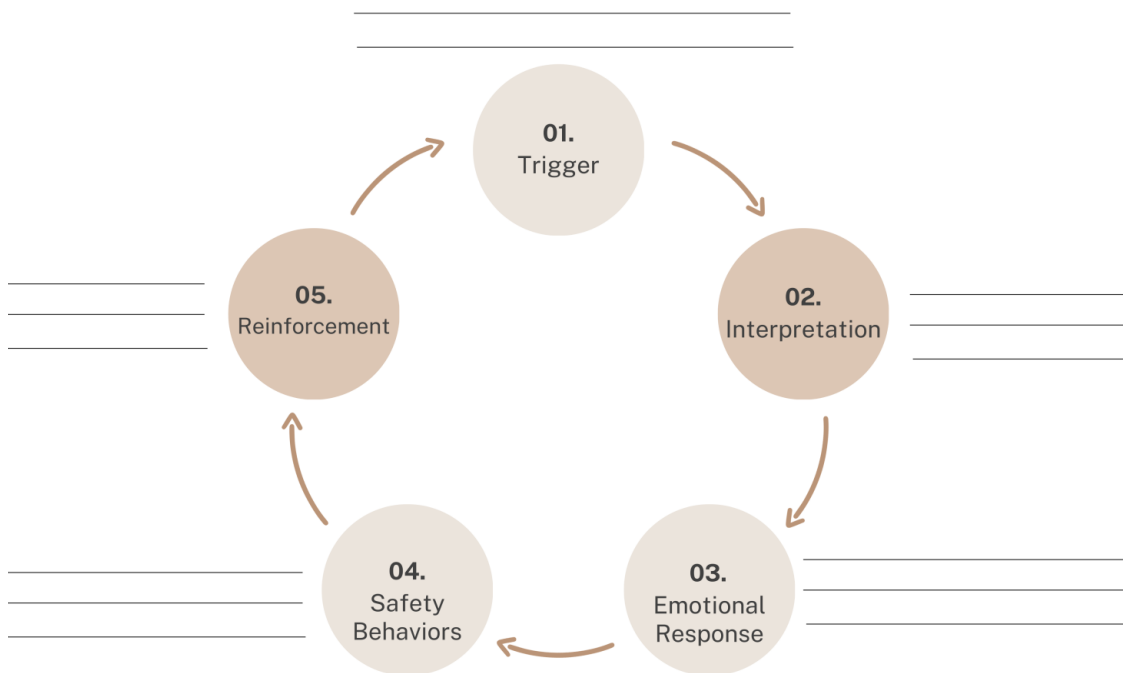
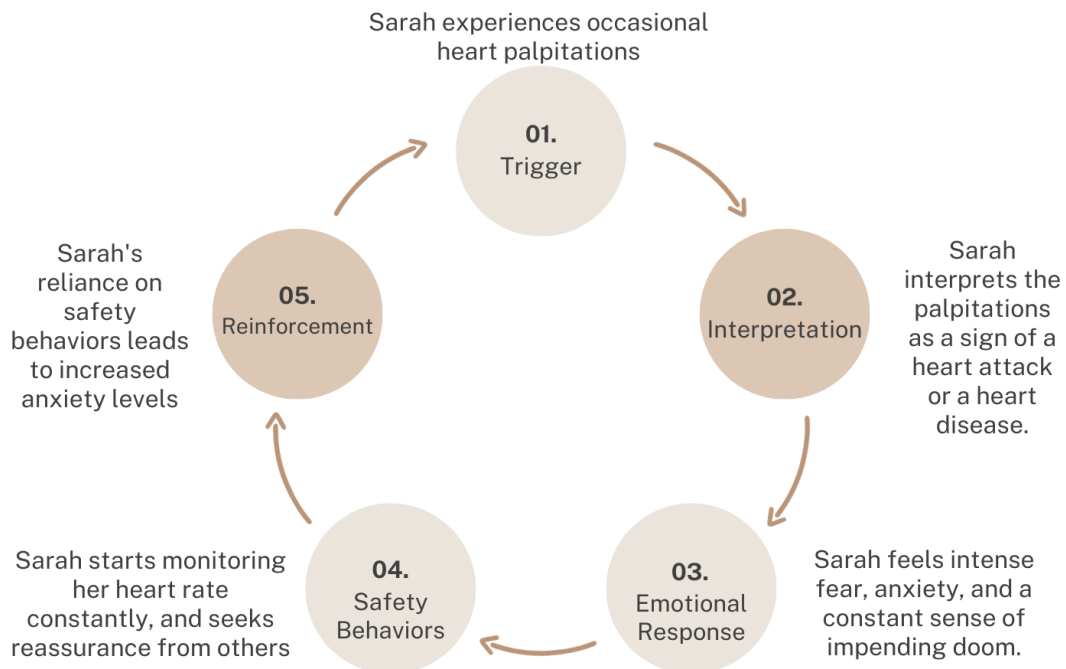
2. Perception and Interpretation: You quickly interpret the symptom as a sign of a serious illness or medical condition.

3. Emotional Response: You start feeling intense fear, anxiety, and worry about your health.

4. Safety Behaviors: In an attempt to alleviate your anxiety, you engage in checking behaviors, such as searching for medical information online, constantly monitoring your body for changes, or seeking reassurance from others.

5. Reinforcement: Indulging in safety behaviors and maintaining anxious thoughts can contribute to heightened anxiety levels, decreased quality of life, and impaired daily functioning.

6. Repeat: The cycle continues to repeat itself, often escalating in intensity and frequency.



Identify Underlying Beliefs

One way to identify your core beliefs related to health anxiety is by using the "downward arrow" technique, which is commonly used in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).

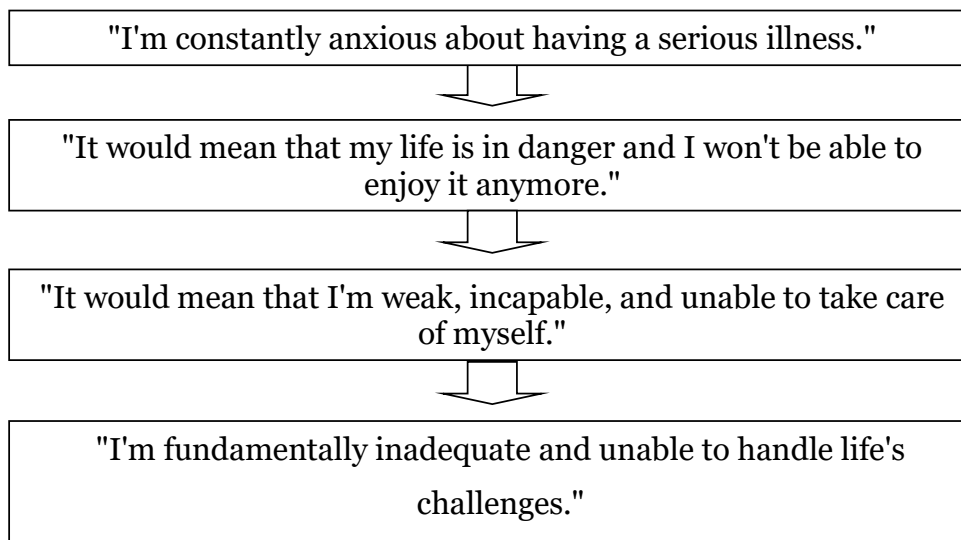
Step 1: Start with a specific worry or fear related to your health

Step 2: Ask yourself, "If that were true, what would it mean to me?" and note down your response.

Step 3: Then, ask yourself, "And if that were true, what would it say about me as a person?" Continue to explore deeper and record your response.

Step 4: Repeat the process with each subsequent belief until you reach a core belief that feels significant.

Example:



Downward Arrow

↓

↓

↓

↓

Once you identify the underlying belief, challenge it by answering the following questions:

1. What alternative explanations or perspectives could exist?

2. Are there any examples from my past that contradict this belief?

3. How would someone else, such as a close friend, view this situation differently?

4. Am I applying a double standard or being too harsh on myself?

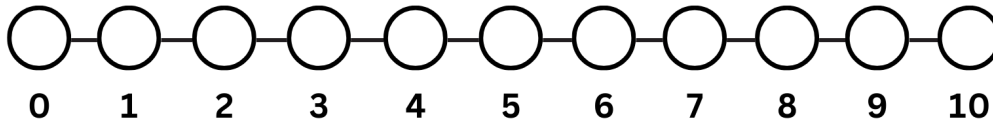
5. If a friend were in the same situation, what advice would I give them?

6. What positive or empowering belief can I replace this negative belief with?

Challenge Your Health Worries

Step 1: Identify your health worries

Write down the specific health worry that is currently causing you distress and rate the level of distress it's causing:



Step 2: Evaluate the evidence

Distinguish between objective facts and subjective thoughts or interpretations. Consider if your worries are based on concrete evidence or if they are influenced by emotions, fears, or biases.

1. What evidence do I have to support this worry?

2. What evidence do I have against this worry?

3. Have I experienced this symptom or concern in the past? If so, what was the outcome?

4. Are there any alternative explanations for these symptoms?

5. Has a medical professional provided any insight or reassurance regarding this concern?

Safety Behavior

1. Identify your safety behaviors:

Write down the specific behaviors you engage in when experiencing health anxiety. For example:

- ☐ Monitoring bodily sensations excessively
- ☐ Seeking constant reassurance from others
- ☐ Avoiding physical activities or situations that trigger anxiety
- ☐ Engaging in frequent internet searches about medical conditions
- ☐ Wearing protective gear (masks, gloves, etc.) excessively even when not necessary.
- ☐ Engaging in excessive handwashing or sanitizing to prevent illness.
- ☐ Overusing or misusing medication or supplements as a preventative measure against illness.
- ☐ Frequently canceling or rescheduling appointments or plans due to health concerns.
- ☐ Frequently calling or visiting doctors or emergency rooms for minor symptoms.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Rate the effectiveness of each safety behavior:

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how effective each safety behavior is in reducing your anxiety temporarily. Consider factors like the duration of relief and the overall impact on your well-being.

3. Identify the negative consequences of safety behaviors:

Write down the ways in which your safety behaviors are negatively affecting your life and well-being. This could include:

- ☐ Increased anxiety in the long run
- ☐ Social isolation or strained relationships due to seeking reassurance excessively
- ☐ Limited engagement in physical activities leading to decreased fitness or wellness
- ☐ Impairing daily functioning and productivity as excessive time and energy are devoted to health worries.
- ☐ Experiencing increased financial strain from excessive medical expenses, such as unnecessary tests or treatments.
- ☐ Compromising the immune system through excessive hygiene measures, which can reduce exposure to normal bacteria and weaken natural defenses.
- ☐ Reinforcing maladaptive thought patterns and cognitive distortions by perpetuating the idea that health worries should always be taken seriously.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

5. Plan alternative coping strategies:

Brainstorm healthier coping strategies that can replace your safety behaviors. Some suggestions could be:

- ☐ Practicing relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, etc.
- ☐ Engaging in regular physical exercise under professional guidance
- ☐ Seeking support from a therapist or support group for managing health anxiety
- ☐ Limiting internet searches and relying on reputable sources for health information
- ☐ Establishing a structured daily routine to provide a sense of stability and reduce anxiety.
- ☐ Engaging in pleasurable activities – hobbies, interests, or activities that bring you joy and divert your attention from health worries.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

6. Gradually reduce and replace safety behaviors:

Set small goals to reduce or replace each safety behavior. Start with behaviors that feel more manageable for you. Track your progress over time and celebrate even small achievements.

Safety Behavior	Alternative coping strategy	Notes
<i>e.g., Whenever I experience a physical symptom that could potentially be related to a serious health condition, I immediately search the internet for self-diagnose.</i>	<i>I will prioritize activities that promote my overall well-being, such as exercise, maintaining a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and practicing relaxation techniques like deep breathing or meditation.</i>	<i>Initially, it was challenging to resist the urge to search for information, but with practice, I gradually became more skilled at managing my anxiety.</i>

Schedule Worry Time

Select a consistent time and a quiet, comfortable location where you can dedicate around 15-20 minutes for your worry time.

Use a timer or alarm clock to ensure that you stick to the allocated worry time.

During your scheduled worry time, write down all the health-related concerns that are on your mind. Be as specific as possible about each worry while remaining within the given time frame.

Once your worry time is over, consciously let go of those worries. Remind yourself that you have allocated specific time to address them, and you will revisit them during the next scheduled worry time if necessary.

1. My worry time is scheduled for: _____

2. When I'm tempted to worry past the 15-minute block, I will say to myself:

e.g., "I acknowledge that these worries are important to me, but I will postpone them until tomorrow's designated worry time."

3. After my worry time is over I will:

e.g., Engage in hobbies or activities that bring me pleasure and help shift my focus away from worries.

Keep a Worry Journal

Keeping a worry journal can assist you in seeing what outcomes emerged from your worries and realizing that they often do not materialize.

Symptom	Worried Thoughts	Impact	Actual Outcome
<i>e.g. Chest pain</i>	<i>"I often experience chest pain, which means I must have heart disease."</i>	<i>Difficulty focusing on tasks or enjoying daily activities due to preoccupation with health concerns.</i>	<i>After seeking medical evaluation, it was determined that the chest pain episodes were not related to any underlying heart conditions.</i>

Coping Skills

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Look around and identify:

5 things you can see,
4 things you can touch,
3 things you can hear,
2 things you can smell, and
1 thing you can taste.

Engaging your senses helps to ground you in the present moment and shift your focus away from anxious thoughts.

2. Grounding through Breathing

- Find a comfortable position and take slow, deep breaths.
- As you breathe in, notice the sensation of air filling your lungs, and as you breathe out, feel the release of tension from your body.
- You can also count your breaths or repeat a calming phrase or word in sync with your breaths.

3. Body Scan

- Sit or lie down in a relaxed position and bring your attention to your body.
- Starting from your toes, gradually move your focus up your body, paying attention to any sensations or tensions you notice.
- If you come across any areas of tension, consciously relax those muscles before moving on.

4. Grounding through Objects

- Hold an object with varied textures, such as a stress ball or a smooth stone.
- Pay attention to the sensations on your skin as you touch the object, noticing its weight, temperature, and texture.
- Let yourself become fully present in the experience, using the object as an anchor to the present moment.

5. Grounding with Movement

- Engage in physical activities like walking, stretching, or dancing.
- Pay attention to the sensations of your body in motion, the feeling of your feet connecting with the ground or the rhythmic movements of your limbs.
- Focus on the physicality of the movement, allowing it to ground you in the present.

6. Mental Counting

- Choose a category, such as types of animals, countries, or colors.
- Start mentally counting from one, naming items within that category as you count.
- For example, if you choose animals, you might say "One, dog. Two, cat. Three, horse," and so on.
- This exercise helps redirect your attention and engage your cognitive processes.

7. Grounding with Self-Talk

- Repeat calming statements to yourself, such as "I am capable of handling this," or "I am safe and grounded in the present moment."

8. Distraction

- ☐ Read a book or listen to an audiobook.
- ☐ Solve crossword or Sudoku puzzles.
- ☐ Play a musical instrument.
- ☐ Engage in a creative hobby like painting, drawing, or knitting.
- ☐ Watch a movie or binge-watch a TV series.
- ☐ Try out a new recipe and cook a delicious meal.
- ☐ Take a relaxing bubble bath or practice self-care activities.
- ☐ Explore a new neighborhood or go for a walk in nature.
- ☐ Listen to your favorite podcast or explore new ones.
- ☐ Play board games or card games with friends or family.
- ☐ Write in a journal or start a gratitude practice.
- ☐ Do a workout or engage in physical exercise, like yoga or dancing.
- ☐ Organize and declutter a specific area of your home.
- ☐ Learn a new skill or take an online course.
- ☐ Do a DIY project or engage in home improvement tasks.
- ☐ Watch funny videos.
- ☐ Spend quality time with your pets.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Practice Self-Compassion

Write down your thoughts and concerns related to your health anxiety.
For each thought or concern, reframe it into a compassionate statement.

Example:

Thought or Concern: "I often feel overwhelmed by researching symptoms online, thinking I have rare and severe illnesses."

Compassionate Statement: "It's okay to seek information about my health, but I'll remind myself that excessive research can intensify anxiety. I will set healthy boundaries and limit my online searches, trusting medical professionals to provide accurate guidance."

Thought or Concern:

Compassionate Statement:

The following are some examples of compassionate statements:

- ☐ It's completely understandable that I'm feeling anxious about my health.

- ☐ I need to remind myself that anxiety can often amplify physical sensations and make them seem more serious than they actually are.
- ☐ While it's natural to seek reassurance from medical professionals, I should try not to rely on it excessively.
- ☐ I'm not alone in experiencing health anxiety; many individuals struggle with this issue.
- ☐ It's important to remember that I am not defined by my health anxiety; there are many other aspects that make up who I am.
- ☐ I will remind myself that I have overcome challenges before and have the strength to overcome this anxiety as well.
- ☐ It's okay to take breaks from researching symptoms or seeking medical information online; too much information can feed into my anxiety.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: Illness anxiety disorder · Formal diagnosis when criteria are met.
- ICD-11 CDDR: 6B23 Hypochondriasis · Formal diagnosis.
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Confirm persistent health preoccupation and impairment despite appropriate evaluation; assess somatic symptom disorder, OCD, panic, GAD, delusional disorder, depression, genuine medical illness, and substance/medication effects.

Document-specific corrections

- Pages [2, 4, 18] · Frame Health Anxiety· using the DSM/ICD status below; add duration, impairment, exclusions, and differentials without reproducing criteria. The title alone must never be treated as a diagnosis.
- Pages [1, 2, 3, 4, 15] · Treat the Health Anxiety ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly.
- Pages [15] · Use only within competence and after individualized assessment of acute risk, medical/substance contributors, functional impairment, culture, accessibility, and readiness; stop or adapt exercises that increase destabilization or unsafe behavior. Apply this specifically to the workbook's Self-Assessment, Where Do Your Health Worries Come From?, Identify Your Health Worries, Understand Your Health Anxiety Cycle sections.
- Pages [1, 4, 7, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25] · Review all medical assertions in Health Anxiety with a qualified medical professional; distinguish psychoeducation from individualized advice and add referral thresholds, contraindications, and medication/procedure cautions appropriate to this population.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Treat the Health Anxiety ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly. custom/unvalidated unless evidence is supplied confirm no third-party item wording was adapted

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Use only within competence and after individualized assessment of acute risk, medical/substance contributors, functional impairment, culture, accessibility, and readiness; stop or adapt exercises that increase destabilization or unsafe behavior.
- Exposure work should be formulation-driven, collaborative, graded, and designed to reduce avoidance and unhelpful safety behavior not delivered as forced flooding. Screen medical and trauma-related explanations when relevant.

Crisis and current resources

- U.S.: call or text 988; chat at <https://988lifeline.org/>. Immediate danger: local emergency services. International resources must be separately verified for the intended country and dated.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>

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DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

- <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg113/chapter/recommendations>