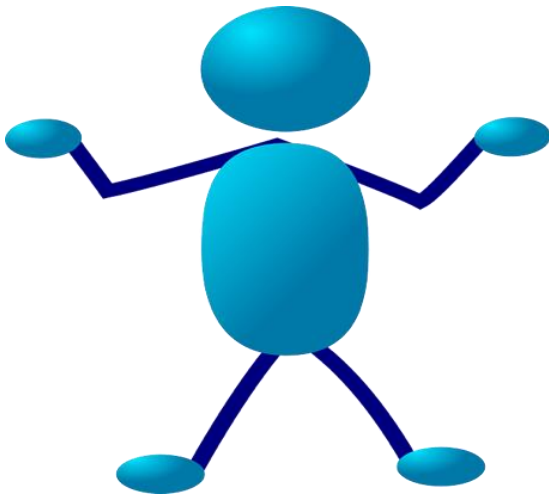


## Health Anxiety

Here at Wellbeing we understand that some people may experience more worries about their own and the health of their loved ones as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a normal and understandable response to a challenging and uncertain situation. Or you may have worried about your health before Covid-19. Either way, you might find the information in this sheet to be helpful.

### What is health anxiety?



Health anxiety is a type of anxiety disorder and refers to the experience of believing there might be something wrong with your health.

It is normal to worry about our health and about contracting an illness in general. To some extent, worrying about our health can be helpful to ensure we engage in healthy behaviours and look after ourselves. For example, limiting our alcohol intake, exercising, and washing our hands according to official guidelines.

This becomes a problem if worries are excessive, out of proportion with the likelihood of having a serious medical condition and persist despite no evidence to suggest something is seriously wrong. Worries can also be accompanied by behaviours, such as seeking reassurance from others, checking our bodies, or avoiding certain situations.

### Health anxiety affects our thoughts, behaviours, body, and feelings

#### Our Thoughts

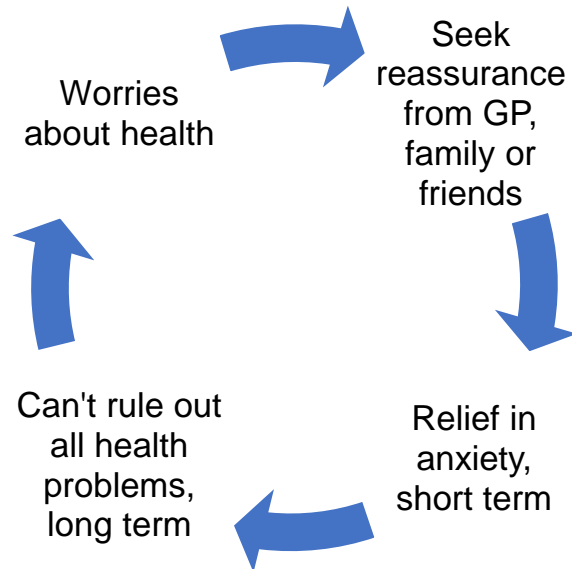
People with health anxiety tend to worry, have negative unhelpful thoughts and images in their mind about symptoms or health related information. They might also engage in a range of unhelpful thinking styles such as jumping to conclusions (*“if my doctor doesn’t know it must be really serious”*); catastrophising (*“it could leave me in a wheelchair”*); all or nothing thinking (*“unless I am completely healthy I must be seriously ill”*); emotional reasoning (*“because I feel something is wrong this must be true”*).

#### Attention

It is common that people who suffer from Health Anxiety spend a lot of time mentally scanning their body for any changes or symptoms as a way of protecting themselves. However, this means they are more likely to notice any changes, no matter how small. If you tend to worry about your health, these might then be interpreted as a sign of illness.

## Behaviours - Reassurance Seeking

It is normal and understandable to seek reassurance from GP, family, or friends if you worry about your health, and this can keep us healthy, if it is done according to medical guidelines. However, seeking reassurance can become problematic if you have worries around your health. Short term, reassurance can give a sense of relief in anxiety, you might also feel more in control, which in turn makes you worry less. However, because we cannot rule out all health problems the relief does not last for long and the worries return. People who suffer from health anxiety may therefore get into a vicious cycle of frequently seeking reassurance from others. This in turn might keep their worries in their mind and keep them going long-term.



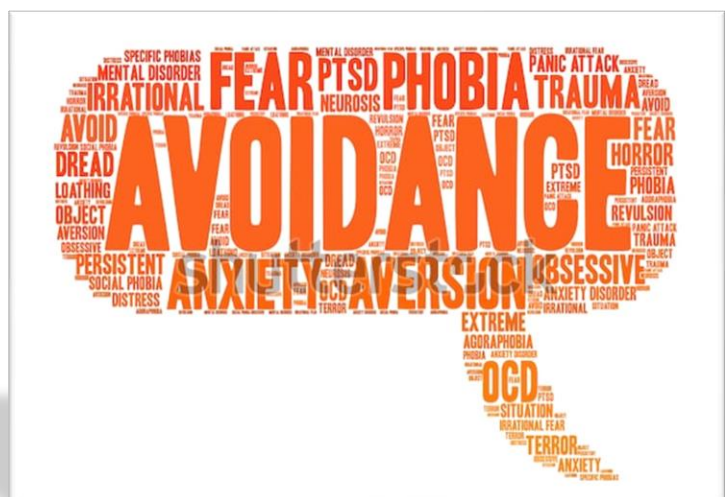
Adapted from: <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

## Behaviours - Checking Your Body

People who suffer from health anxiety will often spend much of their time checking their body for signs and symptoms. However, the more they check, the more likely it is that they will experience any sensations or come across any bumps. Similar to reassurance, checking ourselves can also become a vicious cycle if this is done too frequently and not according to clinical guidelines.

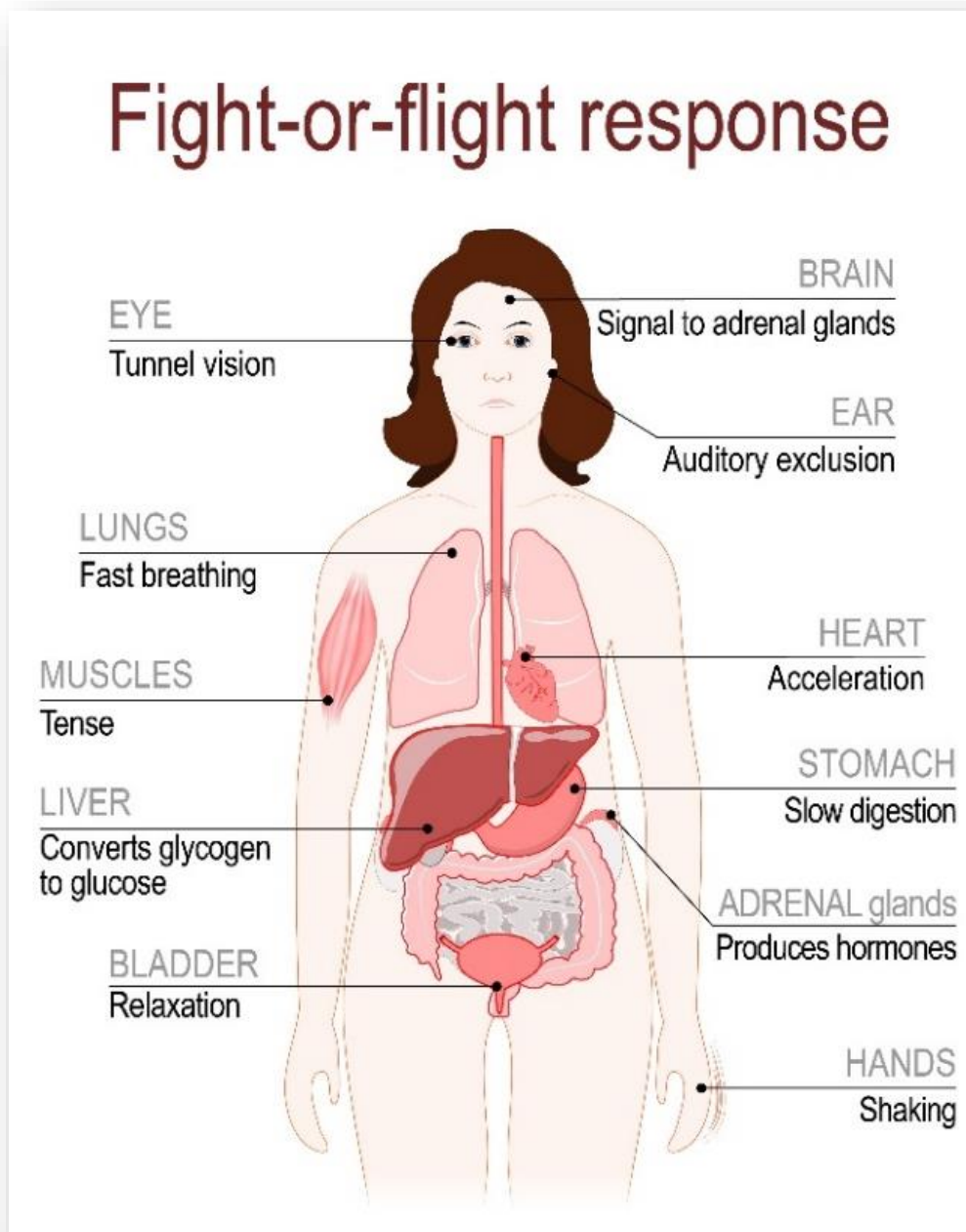
## Behaviours- Avoidance

Sometimes avoiding situations can make us feel better. However, this is a short-term strategy. We know that long-term avoiding things can keep our difficulties going because we do not learn that we are able to cope and nothing bad will happen.



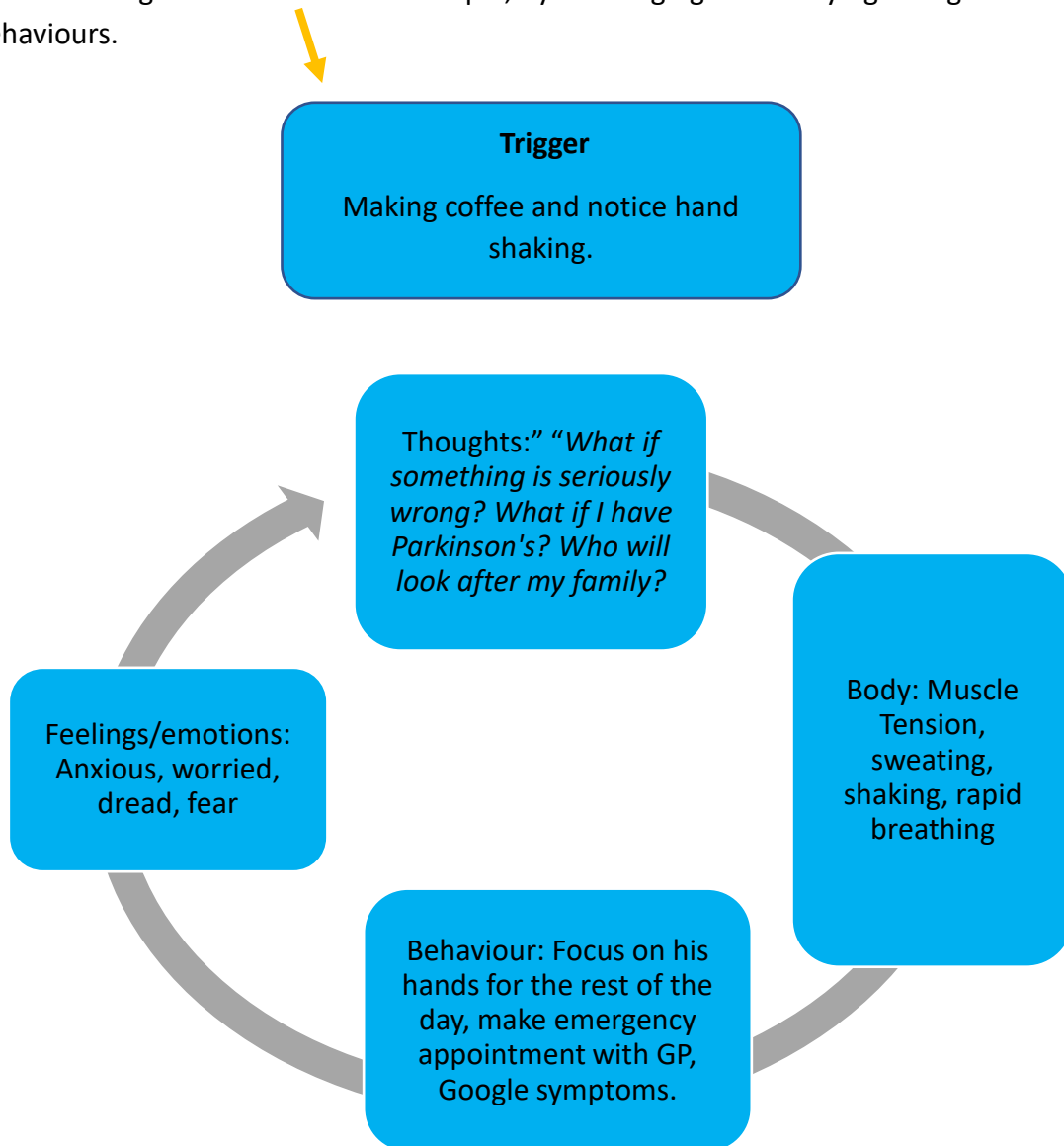
## Our Body

When we become anxious, our bodies alarm system, also called the fight/flight/freeze response is triggered. This system is designed to protect us when we are faced with an immediate physical danger, such as a snake or a bear. However, this system can be triggered and we can (mis)interpret things, which are not actually a real danger to us as being a threat, such as thoughts. It is such thoughts, which lead to feelings of anxiety.



## So, What Can We Do About It?

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a skills-based type of therapy, which can be useful to help you learn how to manage the symptoms of health anxiety. CBT works by looking at the way we think, feel in our body, behave, and our feelings or emotions. For example, by challenging our worrying thoughts and reducing our checking behaviours.



Please look on our Wellbeing website for further info on CBT (click for direct access):  
<http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/>

When our fight/flight system is triggered, relaxation is can be an effective way of calming ourselves and managing our anxiety, for example through diaphragmatic breathing. You can try **placing yourself in a comfortable position, in a quiet place and focus on slowing down your breathing.**

A way of working with our **thoughts** is by challenging these, by looking at their accuracy and see whether we can develop more realistic thoughts. You can do this by finding evidence for and against your thoughts. On our website, you can find more information on how to do this.

Focusing our attention on symptoms in our body can sometimes make us feel more anxious. You might find it helpful to try and focus your attention outwards. For example, by describing your surroundings or using the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Coping Technique.

There are also different ways, in which we can work with our reassurance and checking behaviours. You may find it helpful to gradually reduce the amount of time you spend checking and seeking reassurance until this is according to the advice of your GP or medical guidelines such as NHS. Or you may find it helpful to evaluate how helpful it is for you to continue with a behaviour. **Please see our health anxiety course on our website.**



**The 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique**

Ease your state of mind in stressful moments.

- 5** Acknowledge 5 things that you can see around you. (Illustrated with an eye)
- 4** Acknowledge 4 things that you can touch around you. (Illustrated with a hand pointing)
- 3** Acknowledge 3 things that you can hear around you. (Illustrated with an ear)
- 2** Acknowledge 2 things that you can smell around you. (Illustrated with a nose)
- 1** Acknowledge 1 thing that you can taste around you. (Illustrated with a tongue)







#DeStressMonday      DeStressMonday.org      **DESTRESS MONDAY**

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.

### Useful Websites:

<b>NHS Inform</b>	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">NHS Inform</a>
<b>Wellbeing</b>	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Wellbeing Website Glasgow</a>
<b>Mental Health Foundation</b>	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation</a>
<b>NHS Every Mind Matters</b>	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Every Mind Matters</a>
<b>Psych Central</b>	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">PsychCentral for Mental Health</a>
<b>MIND</b>	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">MIND Information Hub</a>
<b>SAMH</b>	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">SAMH Guidance for Mental Health</a>

### Useful Apps:

	<b>Mind Shift</b>	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	<b>SAM</b>	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	<b>Happify</b>	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	<b>Headspace</b>	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	<b>Calm</b>	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	<b>Smiling Mind</b>	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.