

## Illness Anxiety Disorder

Illness Anxiety Disorder (IAD) is characterized by an individual excessively worrying that they may become severely ill. Other names used for IAD are hypochondria and health anxiety. Individuals who have IAD may or may not have an actual diagnosed medical condition. In most cases, no serious condition is present.



## Signs & Symptoms

People with IAD have a high level of anxiety about health and are easily alarmed by illness, by either hearing or reading about someone becoming ill. They are easily worried about their own health status and perform excessive health-related behaviors, such as repeatedly checking their body for signs of illness. An individual with illness anxiety disorder might:

- Be easily and constantly worried about their own health status
- Perform needless behaviors like repeatedly checking their body for an illness
- Distress excessively about an illness, making it difficult to function in everyday life
- Find little to no reassurance after visiting the doctor or receiving negative test results
- Constantly talk about their health and possible illnesses

## Causes & Risk Factors

Illness anxiety disorder is a chronic condition that commonly starts in early to mid-adulthood. There is no known cause for the disorder, but a major life stressor, history of child abuse, a serious childhood illness, or excessive health-related internet searching may be risks factors for development. IAD is commonly associated with other mental illnesses as well, such as somatic symptom disorder, a personality disorder, anxiety or depression.

## Diagnosis & Treatment

Diagnosing IAD commonly consists of a physical exam and testing for any medical conditions that require treatment. The doctor might also set limits on lab testing, imaging and referrals to specialists. Mental health providers can also help diagnose IAD by performing a psychological evaluation and self-assessment of symptoms. The goal of treatment is to help the individual manage their anxiety about their health and improve functioning in everyday life. Treatment plans commonly consist of a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and anti-anxiety medications. CBT helps those with an anxiety disorder help manage worries and fears.

**If you or someone you know is showing signs of illness anxiety disorder, please call our 24-Hour Helpline at 1.800.928.8000. We can help.**

Sources – Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/illness-anxiety-disorder> and Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/illness-anxiety-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20373782>