

Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

Health Anxiety Formulation



Description

Health anxiety is characterized by a preoccupation with having or acquiring a serious illness, and a high level of anxiety about health. People with health anxiety will engage in excessive health-related behaviors, such as checking their body for signs of illness, or will avoid situations or stimuli that are perceived as anxiety-provoking.

The cognitive behavioral model of health anxiety describes which factors play an important role in the development and maintenance of health anxiety. Cognitive factors include the overestimation of the probability of having or developing a serious illness, overestimation of the seriousness of an illness, and misinterpretations of body sensations / functions / appearance as indications of serious illness. Safety seeking behaviors are also important in health anxiety and include avoidance (of hospitals, sick people, blood, reminders of illness, thought suppression, distraction), checking (of one's body & bodily functions, of one's memory), information seeking (via repeated medical consultations and tests, searches for information), and reassurance seeking (from professionals, through searches for information).

This model of health anxiety uses a 'vicious flower' format with 'preoccupation with health or illness' as the central feature. Maintaining 'petals' include cognitive factors (such as appraisals of symptoms, or worry), and behavioral factors including avoidance, checking, and reassurance-seeking. This pack comprises two versions of the model: one describing the main features, and another demonstrating a case example.

Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout.

Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – to provoke a discussion and explore your client's beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – to improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Supervision tool – to develop formulations and knowledge.
- Teaching resource – a learning tool during training.

References

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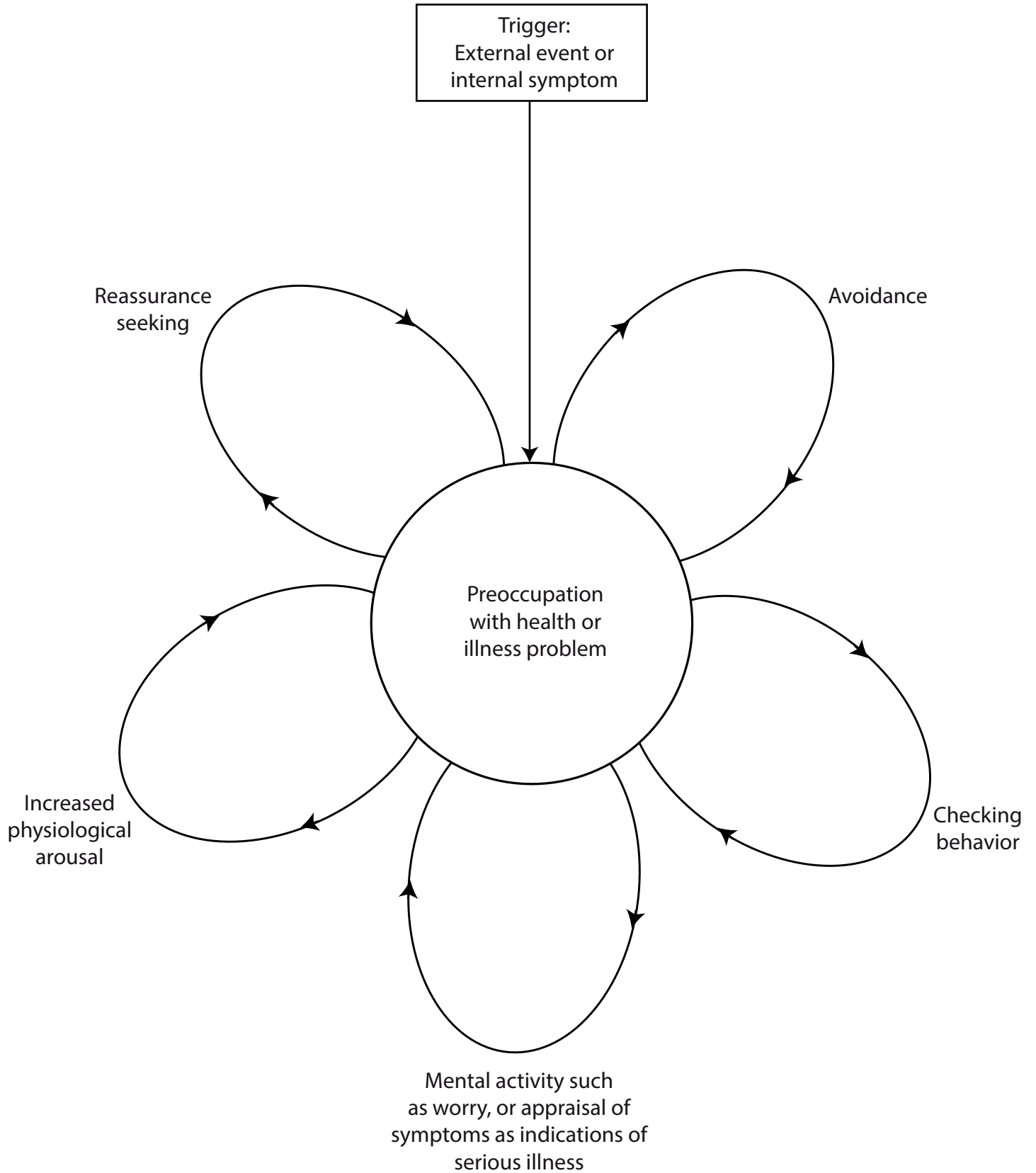
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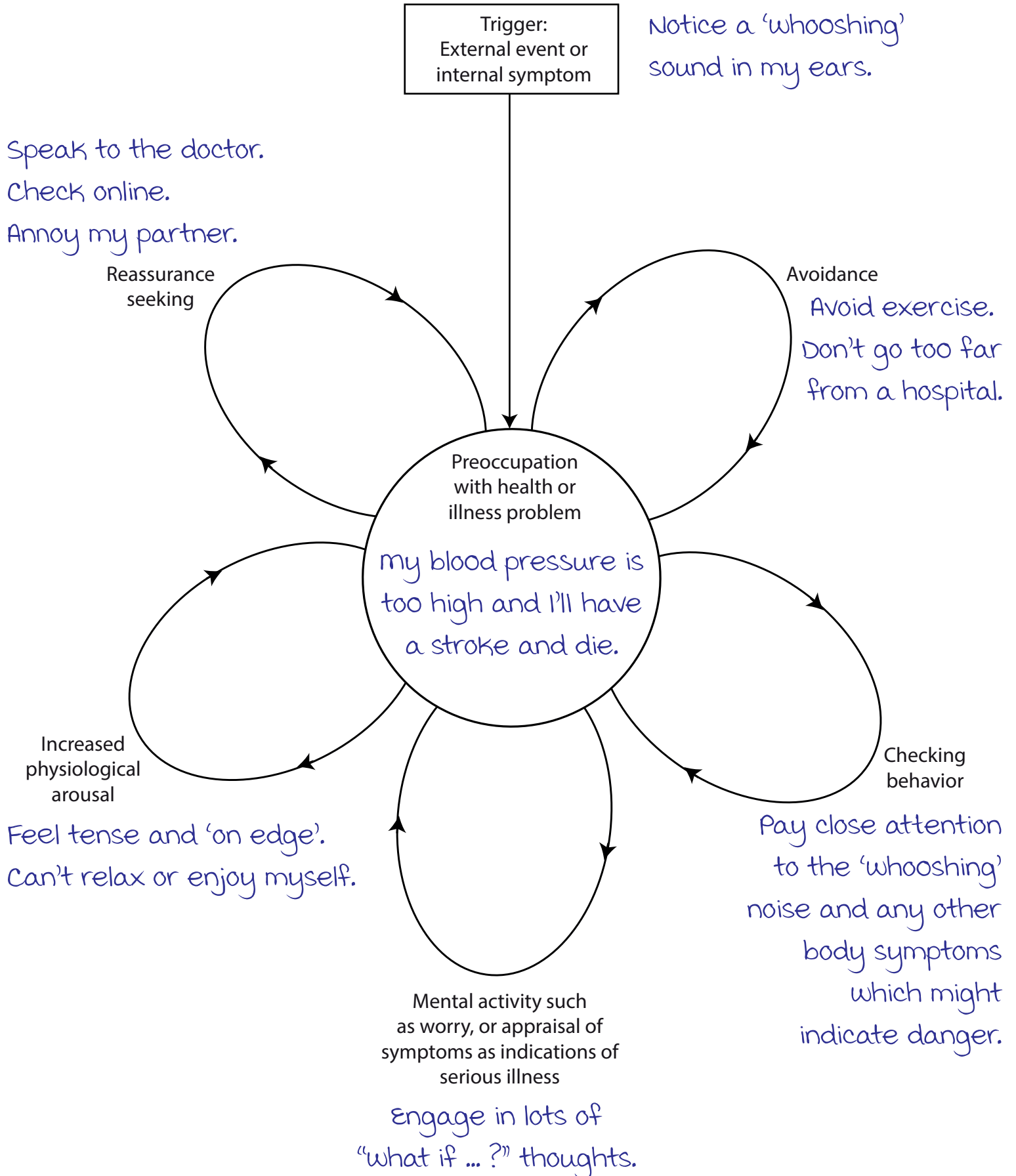
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