

## **Life Experiences and possible triggers concerning health anxiety**

### **Life Experiences**

Here are some examples of the kinds of experiences that people we meet who have health anxiety describe as having contributed to their preoccupation:

- a family member being severely ill when you were growing up.
- being over-protected as a child, especially from illness.
- being over-protected as a child from deaths, funerals, illnesses in the family.
- being severely ill as a child.

You may have been brought up in a family with unspoken rules like:

- 'You don't have anything if you don't have your health,' or
- 'You can't be too careful when it comes to your health'.

You are likely to have learnt these rules, and they now influence your behaviour.

### **What can trigger health anxiety?**

Although it can occur at any age, health anxiety most commonly develops in early adulthood. The most common triggers for a health anxiety are:

- stress
- illness
- recovering from illness
- illness of a family member
- loss of a family member
- exposure to disease related information through the media
- exposure to disease related information through medical training.

Sometimes health anxiety seems to occur out of the blue, without any identifiable trigger or social factors,

It may sometimes be triggered by a panic attack that raises a person's fear of and focus upon certain bodily or mental sensations.

Some people have their first experience of health anxiety when things are going rather well for them, such as:

- recently becoming happily married,
- enjoying their job, or having a really enjoyable holiday.

In these instances, people report having had a thought like: 'wouldn't it be awful if something happened to me that spoils it all'.

What can you identify as one or more triggers for the beginning of your health anxiety?