



## Helping Health Anxiety

### Module 6

# Reducing Checking and Reassurance Seeking

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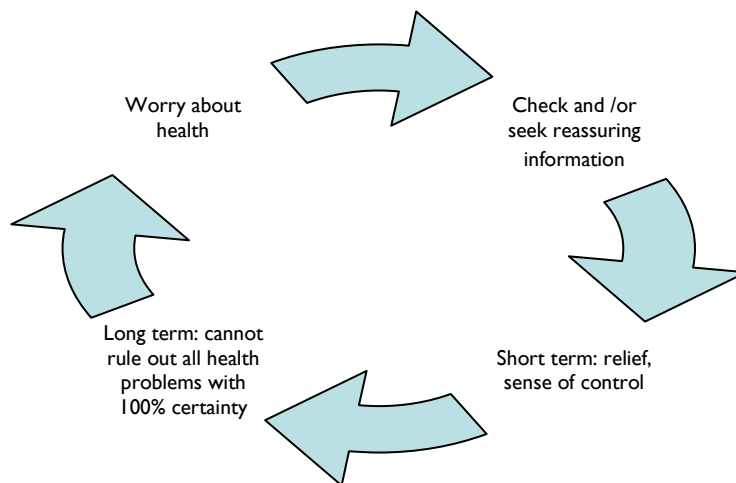
## Introduction

In Module 3, we identified that people with health anxiety will often engage in excessive checking and reassurance seeking behaviours. Generally this is done in an effort to ease health anxieties, but instead these behaviours can actually fuel the problem. In this Module, we will revisit the different ways people check and seek reassurance for their health, explore the difference between helpful and unhelpful checking and reassurance seeking, and explore strategies to reduce or eliminate these behaviours.

### Why Do We Check and Seek Reassurance?

Most of us will engage in checking and reassurance seeking behaviours with regards to our health. We do this to reduce our worrying, increase our sense of control and certainty about our health, and to reassure ourselves that our health is not at risk. These behaviours often give us some short term relief.

Unfortunately, we can never really be sure that we are completely healthy. The very nature of medical tests is to rule in or rule out a particular diagnosis. Doctors do not have a “test for everything” that could possibly go wrong with our bodies. We can therefore sometimes fall into a vicious *Reassurance Cycle* where our worrying about our health leads us to check and/or seek reassuring information about our health. In the short term this gives us a sense of control or relief, but in the long term we cannot rule out all possible health problems, and so the cycle starts again.



As already suggested, it is impossible for anyone to have a 100% guarantee that they are of perfect health. Yet, this uncertainty is something that all human beings must learn to tolerate. Unfortunately, the act of excessive checking and reassurance seeking ultimately stops us from building up this tolerance and accepting that our health is uncertain. Instead we spend a lot of our time preoccupied with trying to rid ourselves of this uncertainty (via checking and reassurance), instead of sitting with the uncertainty and building our tolerance.

One way to break this Reassurance Cycle is to reduce our checking and reassurance behaviours to a more helpful level, and to practice tolerating and accepting some of the uncertainty and anxiety that goes along with not checking or seeking reassuring information.



Throughout this module we will explore the different types of checking and reassurance seeking commonly reported by people with health anxiety. We will also discuss the difference between helpful and unhelpful levels of checking and reassurance seeking and ways that you can start to reduce these behaviours.

## Common Checking and Reassurance Seeking Behaviours

In Module 3, we introduced a range of commonly reported checking and reassurance seeking behaviours. To recap, take a moment to look over the list below and see whether any of the behaviours listed are things you are doing *frequently and repeatedly*. You may also be aware of other behaviours not listed here, so there is additional room to list these below.

- Checking in the mirror for signs of asymmetry, areas of discolouration, or new moles or lumps
- Poking, palpating or pinching of the skin, breasts, stomach or other areas of the body
- Examination of bodily excretions (e.g., saliva, urine, faeces) for signs of blood or infection
- Measuring parts of your body (e.g., using tape measure or callipers)
- Monitoring of bodily processes (e.g., taking pulse, checking blood pressure)
- Weighing of your body or bodily excretions
- Asking family members, friends, and health care providers about your symptoms
- Researching your symptoms on the internet or in medical texts
- Posting of your symptoms on internet sites to obtain others opinions about your symptoms
- Requesting of medical tests or evaluations, and second opinions
- Other checking or reassurance seeking behaviours:




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Take a moment to think about how often you are doing these behaviours and record this below. If you are not certain, you may wish to engage in a mini-survey to work out the amount and frequency of your behaviours. For example, you could:

- Ask family or friends to note down each time you ask them about a health issue over a set period
- Place a notepad and pencil next to your mirror and keep a tally of each time you check yourself
- Review your diary to see how many medical appointments you have had in the past month
- Record how much time you spend on the internet researching your symptoms

Behaviour	Amount / Frequency
<i>e.g., Checking the moles on my back in the mirror</i>	<i>Twice daily</i>
<i>e.g., Researching symptoms on the internet</i>	<i>About three hours each weekend</i>
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If you engage in several of these behaviours, you may wish to select one or two to work on whilst completing this module. Some people prefer to start with reducing those behaviours which are having the most impact on their everyday lives. Others prefer to start on those behaviours that they feel might be easiest to work on first, gradually building their confidence to tackle some of the harder changes later.

Which one or two checking or reassurance seeking behaviours will you work on first? Record them below:

1. 

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2. 

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Once you have worked on these for a while, you can then come back and address any remaining behaviours.

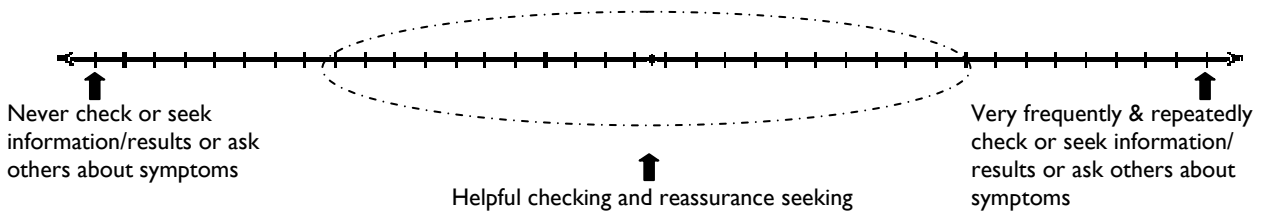
## Helpful vs. Unhelpful Checking and Reassurance Seeking

It is generally considered helpful to be aware of changes in our bodies, to check our bodies for signs of ill health, and to ask for medical opinions and advice. Ultimately, engaging in these behaviours is designed to protect us from ill health and to ensure our longevity.



So, when do these behaviours become problematic? What is considered too much? Well, it may vary from one behaviour to the next, but in general we have to think about health seeking behaviours as being on a continuum. If our behaviours fall at either of the two extremes of the continuum, we may not be engaging in “healthy” levels of checking and reassurance seeking.

For example, let’s think about the health behaviour of regular breast self-examinations. Someone who never conducts breast self-examinations might put themselves at risk by not being aware of changes to their breast tissue. However, someone who checks daily may be checking too regularly to actually notice any changes, and could develop discomfort or soreness due to the continued prodding and poking.



The goal of this module is therefore not to move you from one extreme to the other, by asking you to eliminate all checking and reassurance seeking behaviours. The goal is to be able to develop more helpful levels of these behaviours and to decrease the negative consequences often associated with high levels of checking and reassurance seeking.

Excessive levels of checking and reassurance seeking may have multiple negative consequences for you aside from fuelling your health anxiety. The following are just a few examples:

- Frequent physical prodding and poking can increase feelings of pain or tenderness.
- Medical appointments and tests may have significant financial costs attached.
- Significant time may be spent engaging in checking and reassurance seeking rather than engaging in activities that can give you a sense of enjoyment or achievement (e.g., work, socialising).
- Your relationships with friends, family and health care providers may also be tested, as your continuous striving for reassurance combined with a lack of clear answers can leave both you and others feeling frustrated.

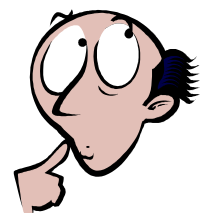
Take a moment to write down any negative impacts of your checking or reassurance seeking behaviours. What do you notice? Are these behaviours something that you would consider changing?

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*Note: In the next module, we will address avoidance behaviours that can occur at the other end of this continuum (e.g., for people who never check or seek information/results or ask others about symptoms).*

## How to Reduce Unhelpful Checking and Reassurance Seeking

One way to reduce our levels of checking and reassurance seeking is to evaluate just how helpful the current behaviour is, and to consider and test out alternative health behaviours. We suggest you use the following 3 Step process and worksheet on page 10 to help you address these behaviours. The worksheet is designed to guide you through the evaluation and planning process step by step, allowing you to see more clearly how helpful your current behaviours are, and to evaluate and plan alternate behaviours.

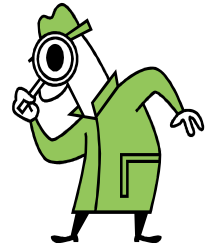
### Step 1- Evaluate how helpful your current health behaviour is

To do this, you will need to:

- Identify the health behaviour you are going to work on (e.g., checking my breasts daily for lumps)

Then, you will need to ask yourself:

- What is the goal of my behaviour?
- Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am?
- Are there any disadvantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am?
- Does this behaviour really achieve my goal?
  
- At this point, how much sense does it make to keep going with this health behaviour?
- How much sense does it make to do it as frequently as I do?
- Do the advantages of this behaviour outweigh the disadvantages?



Completing these questions should give you some ideas about how helpful your current behaviour is and whether it is therefore something you want to keep doing or change. But remember, changing your behaviour doesn't necessarily mean getting rid of it! Sometimes it might make sense simply to reduce the amount or frequency.

The next question is therefore an important one.

- Do I need to decrease, postpone or eliminate this behaviour? Why?

### Decrease or postpone your behaviour

To postpone your behaviour means to put it off until a clearly defined but later time. To decrease or postpone your behaviour makes sense when your behaviour is something that is consistent with advice given by medical practitioners, but you are doing it:

- *excessively,*
- *too frequently, or*
- *in the absence of any significant symptoms.*

For example, medical practitioners often encourage us to be aware of any changes in the colour, shape and size of our moles. However, consider the following case:

*... after hearing news that an old friend had died from skin cancer, Jim grew concerned that he too would miss a change in his moles and develop cancer. He therefore began each day by measuring the size and shape of each of his moles – spending up to an hour each day making detailed sketches and notes regarding the dimensions of each mole on his body. He was often late for work as a result.*

Respected organisation, The Cancer Council® of Australia, recommend visually checking your body approximately once every three months for signs of skin cancer, and notes that this should take approximately 15 minutes<sup>1</sup>. As you can see, Jim's behaviour represents a significant departure from this health information, so he might consider gradually decreasing or postponing his checking until it reaches the recommended levels.

<sup>1</sup> Please note that this information was correct at the time of publication but may since have changed. We recommend using the "Evaluating Health Information Checklist" in Module 5 (page 10) to evaluate any new health information you are considering using as a guideline.

## Eliminate your behaviour

To eliminate your behaviour makes sense when your behaviour is at odds with the advice of medical practitioners. For example, most medical practitioners would discourage the use of internet chat rooms as a means of obtaining health information, due to the limited quality control in this form of communication. Similarly, in most circumstances, medical practitioners would discourage you from engaging in any self-examination that results in significant pain or discomfort.



Remember, if you are not sure whether you have a good understanding of recommended levels of checking or reassurance seeking behaviours, you can use the “Evaluating Health Information Checklist” from Module 5 to evaluate any information you are considering using as a guideline. Or, even better, ask your medical practitioner for appropriate guidelines regarding self-examinations and check-ups.

## **Step 2 - Generate and evaluate a new behavioural goal**

Based on your decision to decrease, postpone or eliminate your behaviour, you will need to:

- generate a new behavioural goal, and
- identify what specifically you will do to work towards this goal

In some circumstances, the new goal and specific behaviours attached can be easily identified and attempted straight off. For example, imagine that you had been researching “causes of muscular twitching” on the internet to find out whether your symptoms were normal or a sign of serious illness. An alternative goal might be “to postpone any further researching on the internet”, as this would give you time to see whether the symptoms progress or go away of their own accord. The specific behaviour attached to this goal might then be “I will wait a week and see whether my symptoms get worse before taking things any further”.



However, sometimes reducing or eliminating particular behaviours may be something that you need to do more gradually. For example, if Jim were to immediately set a goal of “visually checking my moles, only once every three months for fifteen minutes as per the Cancer Council’s recommendations”, there is a chance that this would be too difficult to do straight away. Instead he could break his goal down into smaller steps, gradually working towards the recommended level of checking.

To make gradual reductions in a particular behaviour we recommend that you use a *Stepladder* to help you 1) identify your overall goal, and 2) identify the gradual steps needed to work towards your overall goal. Each step on the stepladder can be given a “Distress” rating between 0 and 100, where 0 = this step is not distressing at all, and 100 = this step is highly distressing. Your stepladder might have fewer or more “in between” steps than the example given below, but the idea is to gradually build up to your overall goal in an achievable manner. Here is Jim’s example:

### **JIM’S STEPLADDER**

GOAL: <i>visually checking my moles, only once every three months for fifteen minutes as per the Cancer Council’s recommendations</i>	DISTRESS (0-100) 85
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STEP	DISTRESS
1 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), every day for 30 minutes only</i>	25
2 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), every 2<sup>nd</sup> day, for 20 minutes only</i>	35
3 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), every 4<sup>th</sup> day, for 20 minutes only</i>	45
4 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), once per week, for 20 minutes only</i>	55
5 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), once per fortnight, for 15 minutes only</i>	65
6 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), once per month, for 15 minutes only</i>	70
7 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), once every 2<sup>nd</sup> month, for 15 minutes only</i>	75
8 <i>Visually check moles (no drawing or notes), once every 3<sup>rd</sup> month, for fifteen minutes</i>	85

If you need to break your overall goal down in to more manageable steps, you can use this Stepladder below to do so:

## MY STEPLADDER

GOAL:	DISTRESS (0-100)
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STEP	DISTRESS
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Once you have identified your new behavioural goal and what you will specifically do to work towards this goal, you will need to ask yourself:

- What is the goal of this new behaviour?
- Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I have planned?
- Are there any disadvantages to doing this new behaviour as frequently as I have planned?
- At this point, how much sense does it make to try out this alternative health behaviour?



By now, you should have a fairly good idea about whether you have developed a helpful new behaviour and hopefully the scales are tipped towards you wanting to have a go at this new behaviour. However, that does not necessarily mean that it will be easy to do!

We have to expect that we will feel some distress whilst doing these things. After all, if they were easy – you would probably be doing them already! You will therefore need to consider:

- How will I manage any anxiety and worry? What will I say to myself? What will I do?

While there are numerous things you could consider here, particularly drawing from the work you have already done in Module 4 “Reducing Your Focus on Health Symptoms and Worries”, here is a short cut of some ideas that other people have reported as being helpful:

- Reminding yourself “this anxiety will pass, it can’t go on forever”
- Reminding yourself that your body is like an old car and will sometimes run a little rough. Not every creak and sound needs an engine overhaul.
- Remembering that if you check or seek reassurance, it may relieve some worry in the short term, but in the long term it can keep it going (i.e., *the Reassurance Cycle*)
  - Viewing this as good practice in learning to tolerate and accept that your health (just like anyone’s) can’t have a 100% guarantee
  - Using relaxation exercises to manage tension
  - Using your attention exercises from Module 4 to bring your attention back to the present, rather than continuing to focus on health symptoms and worries
  - Planning something fun or enjoyable as a reward for taking a difficult step.



## Step 3 – Test it out!!!

If you have worked through steps 1 and 2, it is likely that you will be ready to engage in your new behaviour. Now it is time to DO IT!! Then...

If you were able to do what you had planned, ask yourself:

- What did you find out about yourself?
- What did you find out about your original and new behaviours?

If you were not able to do what you had planned, do not be concerned. It may be that you set too hard a task to achieve immediately, or that your motivation decreased a little (or a lot!) once you were confronted with the anxiety and distress that often goes with breaking the *Reassurance Cycle*.

Therefore, if you had trouble completing any step, we recommend that you:

- 1) Go back to Steps 1 and 2 and re-evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of your original and new behaviours? On balance, does it make sense to go ahead with the new behaviour? Try to focus on the disadvantages of the old behaviour and advantages of the new behaviour.

OR

- 2) Break your new behavioural goal from Step 2 down in to more manageable steps using the *Stepladder*.

Also, don't forget that it is normal to feel some distress while trying out these new behaviours and that changing your behaviour is a bit like riding a bike – it takes encouragement and often lots of repetition before it becomes less worrisome and starts to feel more natural.

On the next two pages are examples of how to complete the *Reducing Checking & Reassurance Seeking Worksheet*. The first example explores the behaviour of a woman who is checking her breasts on a daily basis for signs of breast cancer. The second example explores the behaviour of a man who is researching his symptom on the internet. After you have read through these examples, there is a blank worksheet for you to try out on your own checking or reassurance seeking behaviour.





## Reducing Checking & Reassurance Seeking – Example 1

Step 1: Evaluate how helpful your current health behaviour is

<b>Behaviour:</b> <i>Checking my breasts daily for lumps</i>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Advantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>What is the goal of my behaviour? Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am?</p> <p><i>I won't miss a lump if it is there If there is a problem - I will probably catch it early</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Disadvantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>Are there any disadvantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am? Does this behaviour really achieve my goal?</p> <p><i>Checking daily keeps my mind focussed on the possibility of developing breast cancer - which isn't nice to be thinking about It isn't 100% foolproof. I could still miss something Checking every day has made it hard to work out if there is anything new or changing. It has sometimes made my breasts sore which makes me worry even more that there is something wrong</i></p>
<p><b>At this point, how much sense does it make to keep going with this health behaviour? How much sense does it make to do it as frequently as I do? Do the advantages of this behaviour outweigh the disadvantages?</b></p> <p><i>Checking my breasts is OK. My doctor has even said to be aware of any changes that occur. But doing it every day is making me sore and probably making it hard to notice any real problems.</i></p> <p><b>Do I need to decrease, postpone or eliminate this behaviour? Why?</b></p> <p><i>I need to decrease the amount of checking I do, as my doctor has said it is unnecessary to check as frequently as I do and the more frequent checking is making me sore.</i></p>	

Step 2: Generate and evaluate a new behavioural goal

<b>New behavioural goal:</b> <i>Checking my breasts monthly</i>	
<p><b>What specifically will I do? Will I do it straight away or gradually?</b></p> <p><i>I will check my breasts only once per month. I think I can start this straight away, so will give it a try.</i></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Advantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>What is the goal of this new behaviour? Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I have planned?</p> <p><i>I will still pick up on changes My breasts won't be as sore - this might help me to notice when there is real soreness there, rather than soreness I've brought on by my checking I won't spend so much time thinking about breast cancer If I needed to check more, my doctor would have encouraged me for what I was doing before</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Disadvantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>Are there any disadvantages to doing this new behaviour as frequently as I have planned?</p> <p><i>There will still be times I am worrying about breast cancer. Telling myself I can't check until later will probably leave me feeling uncomfortable for a while afterwards.</i></p>
<p><b>At this point, how much sense does it make to try out this new health behaviour?</b></p> <p><i>I can see there are plenty of reasons to try it out and my doctor will be pleased if I can reduce my checking</i></p>	
<p><b>How will I manage any anxiety and worry? What will I say to myself? What will I do?</b></p> <p><i>I will remind myself that I am still checking and am unlikely to miss anything if I keep up these monthly checks. I will use my meditation exercises to try to manage any worries that keep popping up.</i></p>	

Step 3: Test it out!!!

<b>Was I able to do what I had planned?</b>	
<b>“Yes”</b>	
<p>What did I find out about myself? What did I find out about my original and new behaviours?</p> <p><i>I found it hard not to check everyday because it had become quite a habit. The first two weeks were really hard and I quickly checked a couple of extra times. It was nice to not be sore from the constant poking and prodding. I feel like I am now in a better position to notice any real changes.</i></p>	
<b>“No”</b>	
<p>I may need to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Go back to Steps 1 and 2 to re-evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of my original and new behaviours.</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Break my new goal from Step 2 down in to more manageable steps using the Stepladder</li> </ol>	

## Reducing Checking & Reassurance Seeking – Example 2

Step 1: Evaluate how helpful your current health behaviour is

<b>Behaviour:</b> <i>Researching any new symptoms on the internet</i>	
<p><b>Advantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>What is the goal of my behaviour? Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am?</p> <p><i>I can find out whether my symptoms are normal I can access information my doctor may not even know about I can get instant information rather than waiting for an appointment with my doctor</i></p>	<p><b>Disadvantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>Are there any disadvantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am? Does this behaviour really achieve my goal?</p> <p><i>I have sometime spent ages researching a symptom that ended up being harmless and just went away When I search for one symptom I sometimes get information on some seriously scary health problems. This just leaves me feeling even more worried about what could be wrong Even if I find a match with my symptoms, this usually can't be confirmed until my doctor does some tests.</i></p>
<p><b>At this point, how much sense does it make to keep going with this health behaviour? How much sense does it make to do it as frequently as I do? Do the advantages of this behaviour outweigh the disadvantages?</b></p> <p><i>While I can quickly access a lot of information about my health symptoms on the internet, I can never really be sure that I am on the right track. I may end up worrying about normal symptoms.</i></p> <p><b>Do I need to decrease, postpone or eliminate this behaviour? Why?</b></p> <p><i>It is probably not helping me at all to find out if there is actually something wrong. It is just making me more worried. I should probably eliminate this behaviour.</i></p>	

Step 2: Generate and evaluate a new behavioural goal

<b>New behavioural goal:</b> <i>To not use the internet to research my symptoms</i>	
<p><b>What specifically will I do? Will I do it straight away or gradually?</b></p> <p><i>I will stop using the internet to research explanations for my symptoms.</i></p>	
<p><b>Advantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>What is the goal of this new behaviour? Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I have planned?</p> <p><i>I won't keep myself feeling worried about unlikely and frightening diseases and illnesses. I won't waste time researching symptoms that may be normal.</i></p>	<p><b>Disadvantages of this behaviour</b></p> <p>Are there any disadvantages to doing this new behaviour as frequently as I have planned?</p> <p><i>I'm not going to know what to do with myself. I have spent a lot of time doing this research in the past. I will have to think of some other way to fill my time.</i></p>
<p><b>At this point, how much sense does it make to try out this new health behaviour?</b></p> <p><i>I can see that my internet research only makes me more worried about my health.</i></p>	
<p><b>How will I manage any anxiety and worry? What will I say to myself? What will I do?</b></p> <p><i>I will stick a reminder note on my computer that researching my symptoms only makes me feel worse. I will remind myself that the desire to check will pass with time - I just have to ride it out. I will get out of the house and go for a walk to remove the temptation to search.</i></p>	

Step 3: Test it out!!!

<b>Was I able to do what I had planned?</b>
<b>“Yes”</b>
<p>What did I find out about myself? What did I find out about my original and new behaviours?</p> <p><i>By not researching my symptoms on the internet I am actually less focussed on my health in general. It was initially fairly hard to not check as my computer was never far away. I had to keep reminding myself that the urge to check would pass. I think it will be worthwhile to keep this change going.</i></p>
<b>“No”</b>
<p>I may need to:</p> <p>3. Go back to Steps 1 and 2 to re-evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of my original and new behaviours.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>4. Break my new goal from Step 2 down in to more manageable steps using the Stepladder</p>

## Reducing Checking & Reassurance Seeking Worksheet

Step 1: Evaluate how helpful your current health behaviour is

<b>Behaviour:</b>	
<p><b>Advantages of this behaviour</b> What is the goal of my behaviour? Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am?</p>	<p><b>Disadvantages of this behaviour</b> Are there any disadvantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I currently am? Does this behaviour really achieve my goal?</p>
<p><b>At this point, how much sense does it make to keep going with this health behaviour? How much sense does it make to do it as frequently as I do? Do the advantages of this behaviour outweigh the disadvantages?</b></p> <p><b>Do I need to decrease, postpone or eliminate this behaviour? Why?</b></p>	

Step 2: Generate and evaluate a new behavioural goal

<b>New behavioural goal:</b>	
<b>What specifically will I do? Will I do it straight away or gradually?</b>	
<p><b>Advantages of this behaviour</b> What is the goal of this new behaviour? Are there any advantages to doing this behaviour as frequently as I have planned?</p>	<p><b>Disadvantages of this behaviour</b> Are there any disadvantages to doing this new behaviour as frequently as I have planned?</p>
<p><b>At this point, how much sense does it make to try out this new health behaviour?</b></p>	
<p><b>How will I manage any anxiety and worry? What will I say to myself? What will I do?</b></p>	

Step 3: Test it out!!!

<b>Was I able to do what I had planned?</b>
<b>“Yes”</b>
What did I find out about myself? What did I find out about my original and new behaviours?
<b>“No”</b>
<p>I may need to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Go back to Steps 1 and 2 to re-evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of my original and new behaviours.</li> <li style="text-align: center;">OR</li> <li>2. Break my new goal from Step 2 down in to more manageable steps using the <i>Stepladder</i></li> </ol>

## Module Summary

- Most of us will engage in checking and reassurance seeking behaviours with regards to our health. We do this to reduce our worrying, to increase our sense of control and certainty about our health, and to reassure ourselves that our health is not at risk.
- In the short term, checking and reassurance seeking may provide a sense of relief or control. However, in the long term, we can never be certain that we are 100% healthy, so our worry and need to check and seek reassurance continues in a vicious Reassurance Cycle.
- The more we check and seek reassurance, the less opportunity we have to practice tolerating and accepting that our health (just like anyone's) can never have a 100% guarantee.
- Checking and reassurance seeking behaviours fall on a continuum, where too much or too little can be unhelpful and even unhealthy.
- Excessive levels of checking and reassurance seeking can have a range of negative consequences, including: increased pain or tenderness; financial costs; a reduction in time spent in enjoyment or achievement related tasks (e.g., socialising, work); and relationship difficulties.
- One way to overcome excessive levels of checking and reassurance seeking is to evaluate and test out new health behaviours that involve reducing, postponing or eliminating the current checking and reassurance seeking.
- It is normal to feel some distress while trying out new health behaviours and decreasing your checking and reassurance seeking. If you are finding things tough, use a Stepladder to break down your new goal behaviour in to smaller and more manageable steps.



### Coming up next ...

In the next module, we will start exploring ways to reduce avoidance behaviours.

## About The Modules

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<sup>2</sup>Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology)

### BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in these modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for health anxiety is based on the approach that health anxiety is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours.

### REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

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Furer, P., & Walker, J. (2006). *Health anxiety treatment manual*. University of Manitoba: Manitoba.

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Willson, R., & Veale, D. (2009). *Overcoming health anxiety: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques*. London: Robinson.

### “HELPING HEALTH ANXIETY”

This module forms part of:

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