Health checking experiment

Make a specific prediction and a fair test. Plan any safeguards before practice; record observations afterwards.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

BEFORE PRACTICE

Extra checking / prediction / belief 0-100%

e.g. Without another symptom search, I cannot finish dinner. Belief 80%.

Agreed care and safeguards to keep

e.g. Keep my healthcare plan and necessary assessment.

One planned change and ordinary activity

e.g. Reduce one repeated search and return to preparing dinner.

AFTER PRACTICE - observations and learning

What happened / other rituals or urges

e.g. Felt the urge to search; finished the meal without that extra check.

Learning / belief now / limits of this test

e.g. I could continue while uncertain. This was not a test of medical safety.

Next step agreed with my therapist

e.g. Review the next manageable change with my therapist.

Keep agreed medical care. A worksheet cannot assess new, severe or changing physical symptoms.

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Using this resource

Health checking experiment

What this helps with

Changing a checking habit is easier to evaluate when you know what you are testing. You might predict that uncertainty will become unbearable or that you cannot continue your day without another search. This experiment investigates that coping prediction. It does not ask you to prove that illness is impossible. Start with a familiar repeated behaviour, clearly outside required healthcare, and plan the change with your therapist where appropriate.

How to use it

1. Identify one repeated extra check, search or reassurance request and the prediction attached to it.
2. Confirm what medical care must continue. Choose a modest change to the extra habit.
3. Plan an ordinary activity to continue while allowing the urge, without replacing the check with another ritual.
4. Record the outcome, what you coped with and any limits to the evidence. Review before increasing the task.

A fictional worked example

Oliver wants to repeat the same online symptom search after receiving no new information. His medical plan remains unchanged. He predicts, "If I do not search again, I will be unable to finish dinner," believed 80%. With his therapist, he agrees to leave that repeat search and continue preparing food, without asking his partner the same question instead. The urge comes in waves, and he finishes the meal while still uncertain. His learning concerns his ability to carry on without that extra search. The exercise does not establish whether he has a medical condition or remove the need to follow agreed care.

Keep in mind

Only target extra anxiety-driven repetition, not new symptoms, urgent help-seeking, screening, prescribed checks or follow-up. If the boundary is unclear, consult your clinician first. Do not replace checking with repeated self-reassurance, symptom comparisons or asking someone else to check. Review excessive distress with your therapist.

Sources and attribution

Warwick, H. M. C., & Salkovskis, P. M. (1990). Hypochondriasis. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 28(2), 105-117.

NHS. Health anxiety. Accessed 24 October 2026.

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