

# Cyberchondria: Health Anxiety in Digital Era: A Review Article

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**Abstract:** *Individuals with questions about their health often turn to the internet for information about their symptoms, but the degree to which health anxiety is related to online checking, and clinical variables, remains unclear. The Internet offers fast and unlimited access to an abundance of information. Since health is one of the most important determinants in life, health-related information is one of the most frequently searched topics on the Internet*

**Index Internet, health, Anxiety, Information**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Cyberchondria also called as compucondria refers to a clinical phenomenon in which repeated Internet searches regarding medical information result in excessive concerns about physical health. Cyberchondria is positively associated with symptoms of health anxiety, though it remains unclear as to whether cyberchondria poses a unique public burden. The Internet offers fast and unlimited access to an abundance of information. Since health is one of the most important determinants in life, health-related information is one of the most frequently searched topics on the Internet About three-quarters of adult Internet users search online for information on health topics. The number of searches on health in online search engines has increased significantly in recent years. For example, health searches on Google showed a 57% increase between the time periods 2006–2008 and 2015–2017 This development seems to progress even further in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty-one percent of a general population sample stated that they use the Internet ‘more often’ or ‘much more often’ to search for health-related information since the COVID-19 outbreak

In recent years, the term cyberchondria has been used for describing the emotional distress (mostly anxiety) associated with repeated and/or excessive health-related Internet use. This excessive or repetitive online

health seeking can be triggered by uncertainty or anxiety in hopes of reducing it, but it often has an opposite anxiety-inducing or reinforcing effect In cognitive-behavioral models explaining health anxiety and cyberchondria, health-related Internet search is seen as a form of safety-seeking behaviour

Online medical information may cause repetitive use of Internet resources to search for information on a person’s health Internet users’ panic could escalate because of the inaccurate information they obtain while surfing the Internet.

A large amount of online medical information causes people to spend a lot of time searching for possible symptoms for self-diagnosis Online self-diagnosis can exacerbate people’s anxiety who don’t have much medical knowledge

Although cyberchondria is a phenomenon that has only recently emerged, the wide availability of the Internet and extensive smartphone use make it a public health problem. In particular, university students repetitively use the Internet to address their academic and personal requirements, which may contribute to developing cyberchondria and Internet addiction. Cyberchondria is a common symptom of Internet addiction. Specific individual personality attributes and the availability of information influence vulnerability to cyberchondria Symptoms of cyberchondria include:

Compulsive searching: Spending hours searching online for information about symptoms

Anxiety: Feeling distressed and anxious while searching online

Fear: Fearing having multiple diseases, or believing that you have a serious condition

Self-diagnosis: Trying to diagnose yourself based on online information

Self-medication: Taking medication or herbal remedies for an illness you don't have

Unnecessary appointments: Scheduling appointments with specialists that you don't need

Diet and exercise changes: Making drastic changes to your diet or exercise routine without consulting a doctor

According to the Cyberchondria Severity Scale and a 2016 here are some signs to look out for person having cyberchondria:

- Spend at least 1 to 3 hours researching your symptoms online.
- Online searches make feel distressed and anxious, rather than reassured or empowered.
- Need to search for health information feels compulsive and hard to resist.
- Afraid of having several diseases, not just one or two.
- Feel a need to seek reassurance from a doctor or medical professional.
- Distrust the answer you get from a medical professional.
- Feel a compulsive need to recheck your symptoms online, even after doing exhaustive searches before. On some days, might recheck your symptoms four or five times, or more.

#### HOW CAN CYBERCHONDRIA AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH?

Cyberchondria, like illness anxiety disorder and anxiety more generally, can have an impact on someone's quality of life, especially if it is severe.

Anxiety can be debilitating and make it more difficult to do daily activities.

Anxiety can also raise stress levels. Stress and anxiety can lead to physical symptoms, including elevated blood pressure and headaches.

Anxiety can also have impacts on relationships with friends and family, or take a toll on career if you end up missing work too often for doctor visits. It might even take a financial toll.

Cyberchondria can be harmful because:

- It can worsen anxiety and depression
- It can lead to self-medication with side effects
- It can interfere with daily life
- It can lead to unnecessary medical appointments

Excessive online searching not only makes a person with high illness anxiety more anxious; there are also other risks. A person might choose to self-medicate for an illness they don't have, with a medication or herbal remedy that may have side effects. What's more, much of the health information online is not complete. Even Google warns its search-engine users that medical-related data on the web is "intended for informational purposes only and you should always consult a health-care professional if you have a medical concern." The bottom line is the Internet is an invaluable resource for information, finding providers, making connections and more, but it should never replace the sound advice from a medically trained physician.

If you're experiencing cyberchondria, you can try to:

- Avoid self-diagnosing and seeking unnecessary medical appointments
- Consult your doctor before making changes to your diet or exercise routine
- Talk to someone about your feelings

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