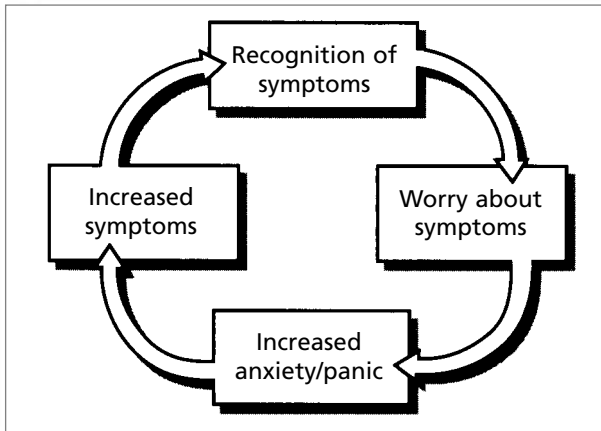


Thinking about unpleasant symptoms will tend to make them worse. We begin the 'fear of fear' cycle, provoking further symptoms as well as preventing existing ones from disappearing.



It is difficult simply to turn your attention away from unpleasant feelings. To do so, two things are necessary.

- ◆ Be determined not to think about or dwell on the symptoms.
- ◆ Fill your mind with other things; distract yourself.

## ■ Distraction techniques

- ❶ **Mental games:** Doing puzzles, crosswords or other word games, reciting a poem, singing a song or counting backwards from one hundred, are all useful distraction exercises. The important thing is that they take your attention away from the panic thoughts.
- ❷ **Environmental focus:** Concentrating on a specific detail of the world around you, for example, making words out of the number plates of cars or guessing what people do for a living. Focusing on the outside world will prevent you thinking about what is going on inside.
- ❸ **Using a bridging object:** This might be a photograph or a special brooch or a souvenir from a happy time. Looking at the object generates positive anxiety-reducing thoughts.

❹ **Physical activity:** Giving yourself a task to do takes your mind off worrying thoughts, for example, handing drinks out at a party, changing the music, or washing up after a meal. On a more general level, keeping yourself physically active and mentally distracted from worrying thoughts by pursuing sporting activities is one of the best insulators against stress.

❺ **Meditation:** Techniques derived from eastern mediation systems can also be very useful. Sometimes a *mantra* or a special word can be used. The mediator focuses the mind upon the mantra in an effortless, relaxed way and with practice can block out other thoughts and ideas and achieve a level of relaxation.

❻ **Reading or talking:** Carry a book with you to read or talk to somebody who is with you. Ask somebody to talk to you.

Use distraction to help you get through situations, but try not to allow yourself to fall into the habit of becoming completely dependent on these techniques. After you have successfully coped with the anxiety using these techniques try to gradually do without them.