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Insight into Cyberchondria-a symptom checker

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Abstract
Many people who experience severe illness will search the internet for self-diagnosis. It is estimated that about 70% of people rely on the internet to get medical information. For some people the information gives them relief and for some people it increases their anxiety level. Cyberchondria refers to the anxiety experienced by the person while searching information related to their health through online. Cyberchondria leads to non-medical problems due to stress. It generally affects the family and social relationship. It can also leads to financial crisis in person's life.

Keywords: Cyberchondria, anxiety, internet, online search, symptoms, treatment

Introduction
For most of the people accessing medical related information through online sources is the most common and useful method. But in some cases these online searches had become more frequent and turn into a pathological disorder. According to National Health Interview Survey (NHIS, 2009) it was shown that 74% of all U.S. adults use the Internet, and 61% have looked for health or medical information on the Internet. Additionally, 49% have accessed a website that provides information about a specific medical condition or problem. With over 560 million internet users, India is the second largest online market in the world, ranked only behind China. It was estimated that by 2023, there would be over 650 million internet users the country (WHO, 2021). Many research studies proved that the present COVID pandemic has led to psychological distress along with depression, anxiety and stress, violence, and unemployment which helps to play a significant role in Cyberchondria. Some studies suggest that young adults aged between 30 and 45 are the most active internet users in searching health related information. The easy accessibility of health related information on the online sources has helped the needy people to take decisions about their health treatment. Despite the people search information in the reputable sites, though the information related medical condition is accurate, excessive repetitive behavior of searching information through online may lead to mental disoders. This article highlights the problematic effect of using online searches for health related information and its management.


Cyberchondria is a disorder in which people searches online information related to health through internet and becomes more anxious rather than finding a relief. According to DSM – 5 this disorder is classified as illness anxiety disorder.

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Cyberchondria, otherwise known as Compucondria
Statistics
- Up to 20% of the US population demonstrates some degree of health anxiety during their lifetimes
- 71% of people with Cyberchondria also have a Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- 45.2% of those with severe health related anxiety also have a Persistent Depressive Disorder
- 16.7% of those with severe health related anxiety also have Panic Disorder
- The prevalence is roughly equal for men and women
- 61% of US people have searched online for medical information

Reasons to make people worry about health
- More time spend on social media
- Negative bias
- Misinformation
- Stressful environment
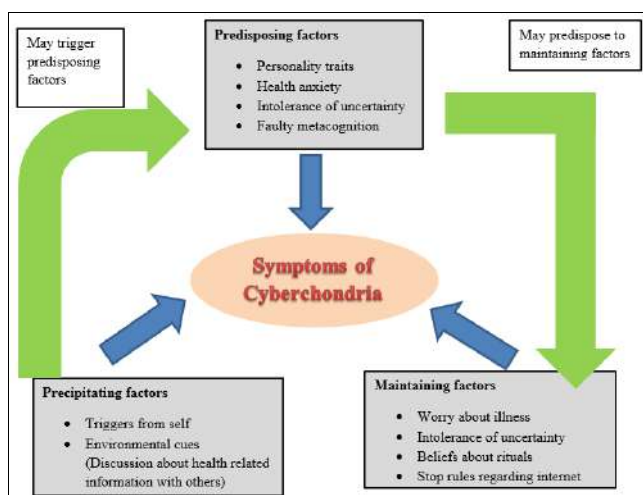
Five characteristic traits
- A compulsive searching of information
- Excessive worry, panic
- Panic of having at least one serious illness
- Excessive time spent online
- Seeking reassurance from the professional person
- Misbelief of Medical professionals

Common causes and triggers of Cyberchondria include:
- Being prone to anxiety in general-71% of people with Cyberchondria also have a Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Past trauma
- Chronic unmanaged stress
- Parent or sibling with Cyberchondria or Illness Anxiety Disorder
- Increased awareness of physical symptoms
- History of serious illness in family or self
- Negative experience with a doctor
- Any major stressors in life
- History of having a serious illness.
- Seeking more attention from family or friends

Symptoms of Cyberchondria
- Anxiety about being sick
- Social isolation
- Stress

- Frequent internet surfing regarding health status and its treatment

Treatment of Cyberchondria should focus on two main goals
To enable the people
- To use the Internet for health-related purposes without experiencing a increased anxiety related to health.
- To reduce the time spent on internet for health-related purposes
- To improve the functioning level of an individual and to prevent the avoidance of neglection of activities by an individual.

Ways to manage Cyberchondria
- Schedule frequent and routine health checkups
- Practice yoga, meditation, relaxation exercises
- Take a periodic break in social media search
- Have a well-balanced diet and sound sleep
- Seek professional help

Psycho interventions
- Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy
- Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy
- Medication selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)
- Psychoeducation focuses on several topics:

(1) What the online search can and cannot do.
(2) Distinguishing between tangible and non-tangible sources of online health information.
(3) Critical appraisal of online health searches and its results.

Pearls to remember to prevent Cyberchondriac attack
- Learn coping strategies
- Do not believe it's not all you
- Breathing exercises and meditation
- Talk to your beliefs
- Do not be ashamed of yourself

Conclusion
Cyberchondria is one of the best example of technology induced psychopathological disorder.it is necessary to better understand the relationship between Cyberchondria, anxiety, online search related to health information. Though the treatment measures are not evidence based, it serve as a basis of treatment. Eventually, it is recommended that the medical professionals routinely ask people about their online searches about health related information and also shows that these factors have impact on their well-being and help-seeking behaviour.

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