

5 READING & VOCABULARY

- a Look at the title of the article. How would you define a hypochondriac? What do you think a 'cyberchondriac' is?



- b Read the article once and check. Then complete the paragraphs with topic sentences A–E.

Topic sentences

In a well written article each paragraph usually begins with a 'topic sentence' which tells you what the paragraph is about.

- A Another problem for cyberchondriacs is that online medical information may be from an unreliable source or be out of date.
- B Sadly, the problem with Dr Google is that he isn't exactly a comfort in times of crisis.
- C The Microsoft study also revealed another serious problem – that online information often doesn't discriminate between common and very rare conditions.
- D Unfortunately, once you have it cyberchondria can be hard to cure.
- E Four hours later I got a diagnosis.

CONFESSIONS OF A *cyberchondriac*

A few weeks ago I was feeling **under the weather**. After days of intensive internet diagnosis, I finally went to see my GP. After examining me she told me that my **heart rate** was a bit fast and sent me off to A&E to have some tests. Did I go straight there? Of course not. First I took out my phone, logged on to Google, and found out that the technical term for a fast heart rate is supraventricular tachycardia. Then I typed these two words into Google.

1

For example, *wrongdiagnosis.com* immediately scared me with a list of 407 possible causes. I raced to the hospital, convinced that I probably needed open-heart **surgery**.

2

I had a chest **infection**...and a bad case of cyberchondria. The only consolation for the latter condition is that I'm in good company. A Microsoft survey of one million internet users last year found that 2% of all searches were health-related.

3

Since my trip to hospital, I have been obsessively checking my **pulse**, swapping symptoms in chatrooms, and reading all about worst-case scenarios. What if the doctors got it wrong? What if the ECG machine was faulty? It's exhausting trying to convince yourself that you might have a **life-threatening** illness.

4

One in four of all articles thrown up by an internet search for 'headache' suggested a brain **tumour** as a possible cause. Although it is true that this **may** be the cause, in fact brain tumours develop in fewer than one in 50,000 people. People also assume that the first answers that come up in searches refer to the most common causes, so if you type in '**mouth ulcer**' and see that '**mouth cancer**' has several mentions near the top, you think that it must be very common. However, this is not the case at all.

5

A recent American study showed that 75% of the people who use the internet to look up information about their health do not check where that information came from, or the date it was created. 'Once something has been put up on the internet, even if it's wrong, it's difficult to remove,' says Sarah Jarvis, a doctor. 'This is a problem especially with scare stories, and also with some **alternative remedies** which claim to be **miracle cures**, but which may actually do you harm.'

Check the information? Sorry, I don't have time – I'm off to buy a heart rate monitor!

Glossary

GP general practitioner (= family doctor)

A&E Accident and Emergency department of a hospital

ECG machine electrocardiogram machine used to test people's heart rate

scare stories stories in the news, e.g. 'Mobile phones give you cancer' which make people worry about their health

Adapted from The Sunday Times

- c With a partner, look at the **highlighted** words and phrases and guess what they mean. Then match them with definitions 1–11.

More medical vocabulary

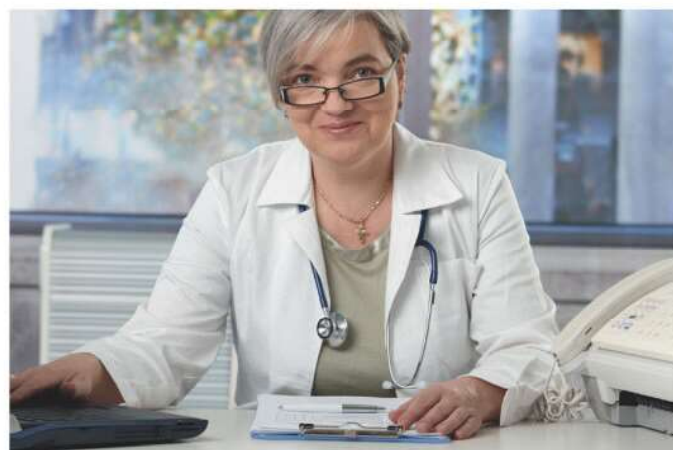
- | | | | |
|----|-------|-------------|--|
| 1 | _____ | <i>adj</i> | sth very serious, which could kill you |
| 2 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | a small blister in the mouth that can be very painful, but is not serious |
| 3 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | ways of curing illnesses that are not traditional medicine, e.g. herbal medicine |
| 4 | _____ | IDM | not feeling very well |
| 5 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | a serious illness in which malignant cells form in the body and kill normal body cells |
| 6 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | an illness that is caused by bacteria or a virus |
| 7 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | the speed at which your heart beats |
| 8 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | the medical treatment of an illness or injury that involves an operation |
| 9 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | the number of times your heart beats in a minute |
| 10 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | a group of cells that are growing in a place where they should not be |
| 11 | _____ | <i>noun</i> | successful treatments for illnesses that were thought to be impossible to cure |

- d **1 40**) Listen and check.

- e Read the article again carefully. Choose a, b, or c.

- The first thing the journalist did after leaving her GP was...
 - go and see a specialist
 - go to A&E
 - find out what her condition was called
- After realizing that she was a cyberchondriac, she...
 - stopped worrying
 - worried just as much as before
 - stopped visiting health-related websites
- One problem with health-related websites on the internet is that...
 - they make unusual illnesses seem more common than they really are
 - they often describe conditions which don't really exist
 - they give more information about rare illnesses than about common ones
- Another problem with these websites is that...
 - they encourage people to go to the doctor more often
 - they make people believe in miracle cures
 - the information may not be right

6 LISTENING & SPEAKING



- a **1 41**) Listen to a radio interview with a doctor about cyberchondria. What's her general opinion of patients using health websites?
- b Listen again. Then answer the questions with a partner.
- What did a patient she saw recently think he had? What did he really have?
 - What four things does she say that diagnosis depends on apart from symptoms?
 - What kind of website forums does she recommend?
 - Complete the three tips she gives to cyberchondriacs:
 - Only look online...
 - Make sure that the website you are using is...
 - Remember that common symptoms usually...
- c With a partner, or in small groups, answer the questions. Ask for and give as much information as possible.
- Which of the doctor's three tips do you think is the most important?
 - How often do you look up information about health and illness on the internet? What websites do you usually go to? How useful is the information?
 - Do you know anyone who you think is a hyperchondriac or cyberchondriac?
 - Do you think people in your country worry a lot about...?
 - their blood pressure
 - their cholesterol level
 - their eyesight
 Do they worry about anything else related to health?

7 **1 42**) SONG *Just Like a Pill* 🎵