

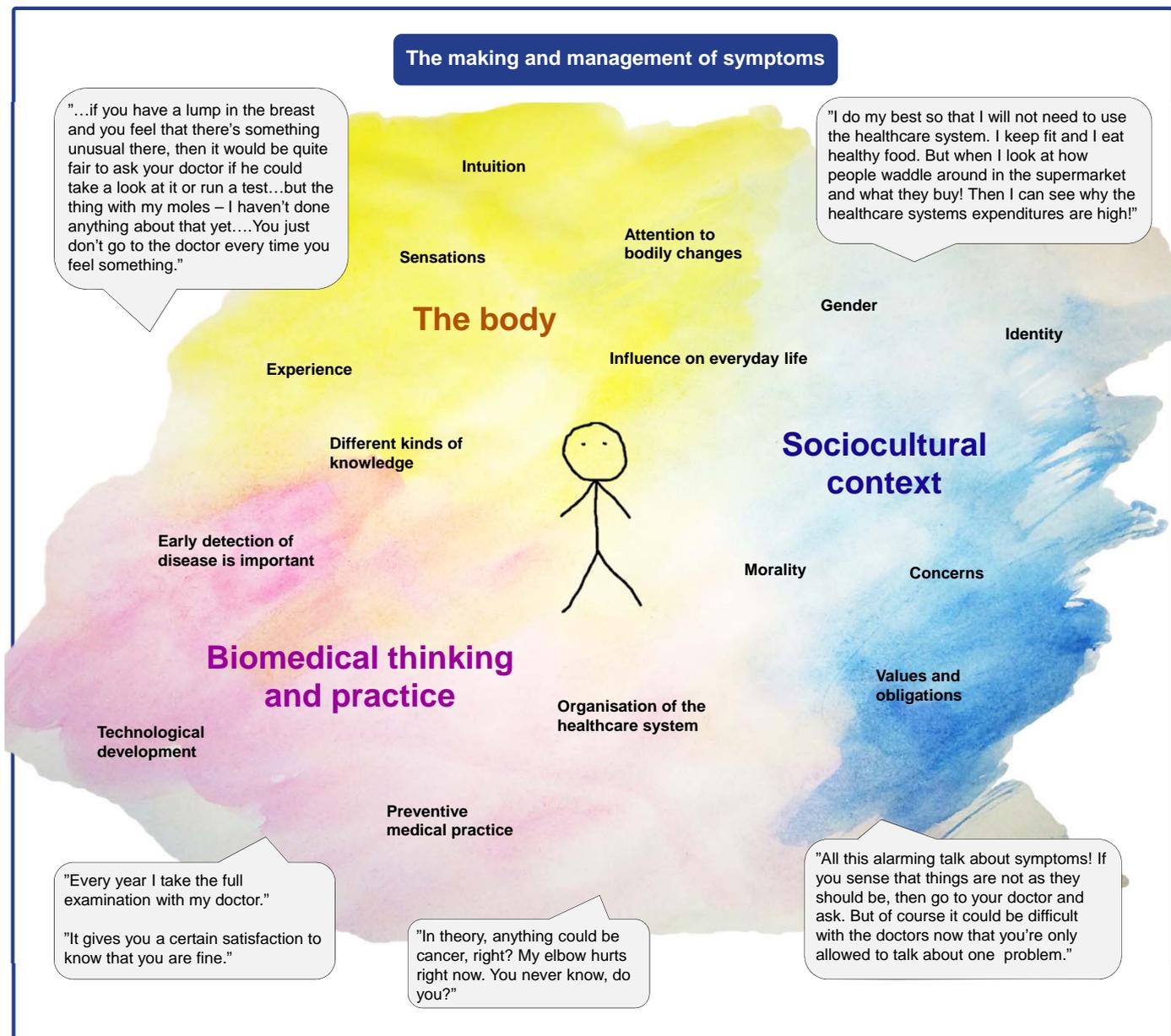
# What is a symptom?

## Sensation to symptom-transformations in everyday life

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### Background and aim

With the importance of early cancer diagnostics as background, this project explores healthcare seeking practices among the Danish middle class.

To discover what happens between people's first experience of symptoms until presentation of symptoms to a healthcare professional, we question the assumption that symptoms are just there to be experienced and acted upon. Hence, the premise for the study is that symptoms are not symptoms until they are interpreted as such.

This study therefore, aims at unfolding the concept of symptoms to discover how symptoms are created and managed in everyday life.

### Methods

The project is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in a Danish middle class suburban neighbourhood.

Fieldwork consisted of:

- 2 years of participant observation (following key informants everyday life activities as well as activities in the area such as choir and sports)
- 42 Interviews (3 interviews with 14 key informant households)
- 18 diaries of symptoms and healthcare seeking (duration: 6 months)

### Perspectives

This study feeds into discussions within research on early cancer diagnostics. By showing the interconnections and paradoxes inherent in the way people sense, interpret and act upon their body's signals, we hope to contribute to a nuanced picture of how symptoms and healthcare seeking can be understood. This may help improving the way we think about interventions aiming at healthcare seeking in the general population.

At the same time, the analysis contributes to a growing field within medical anthropology exploring the senses and sensations in relation to health and illness which may inform further research on the subject.