

Recovery and mental illness

Recovery and mental illness means different things to different people. In this factsheet, we focus on personal recovery. We suggest different support and ways that you can help your own recovery. We hope that this information will help you to work out what recovery means to you, and help you find ways in which you can focus on your recovery. This information is for adults affected by mental illness in England and their loved ones and carers. It's also for anyone with an interest in this subject.

Key Points.

- Recovery means different things to different people. People often talk about clinical and personal recovery. In this factsheet we focus on 'personal recovery'. Personal recovery is about working towards something that is important to you.
- One of your recovery goals might be to be symptom free, or you may accept that you'll still have symptoms. But you aim to cope with them better or make them less severe.
- Treatment can often help towards recovery. But there are other options that you can try at the same time to help your recovery.
- Recovery is a personal journey, but you might need the support of others.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What is recovery?](#)
2. [What can help me recover?](#)

1. What is recovery?

There is no widely accepted definition of recovery. Recovery means different things to different people.

Recovery can mean things like:

- aiming to be symptom free,
- aiming to cope with your symptoms better,
- working towards your symptoms being less severe, or
- managing your mental illness well to be able to live a meaningful life.

Recovery can be a short-term or long-term thing.

As well as helping yourself, you might need help from others. Like mental health and social care professionals or loved ones.

Recovery within the NHS mental health system is often referred to as the 'recovery model.' This model highlights the importance of building resilience in people with mental health problems. As well as the importance and role of family and professionals in supporting people's identity and self-esteem.¹

People often see recovery in terms of:

- clinical recovery, and
- personal recovery.

There is often an overlap between them.

What does clinical recovery mean?

Your doctor might have talked to you about 'recovery'. Some doctors and health professionals think of recovery as no longer having mental health symptoms. Or a reduction of symptoms, which means you're able to live a meaningful life. Sometimes this is called 'clinical recovery.'

You may be under the care of an NHS mental health team. This can mean have people such as doctors, key workers, social workers, or other professionals involved in your care. They should support you in achieving your recovery goals, and what you think is important for your wellbeing.

Dealing with symptoms is important to a lot of people. But recovery can be wider than this and is often known as 'personal recovery.'

What can personal recovery mean?

You might want to start personal recovery to help you to move towards living a meaningful life in line with your values.

The meaning of personal recovery is individual to you. You can think about what is important to you and what it means to you to live a 'meaningful' life.

Think about what you would like to achieve, and you can work towards your goals.

Below are some ways you can think about recovery.

- Taking steps to get closer to where you would like to be.
- Feeling part of the local community and working with others to achieve a goal.
- Achieving something that you find difficult to do, such as getting out of the house.
- Thinking more usefully and positively.
- Feeling settled with your treatment plan.
- Feeling more in control of your life and emotions.
- Having a better social life.
- Being able to have a healthy friendships and relationships.
- Having hope for the future.

Recovery is an ongoing process. It's normal to have difficulties or setbacks along the way. But they can be an opportunity to learn or practice the skills you have developed in recovery.

You could describe yourself as 'recovered' at any stage in your recovery if you feel comfortable in doing so. You don't need to wait for the 'end' or when you reach a certain goal.

What other things do I need to consider in my personal recovery journey?

We think people who are affected severely by mental illness need to access high quality treatment in a timely manner. But there are other important things too that can affect your mental health, such as:²

- social connectedness,
- physical health,
- housing,
- finances, and
- employment and volunteering.

We understand that a lack of support can make mental health problems worse. This can leave people not knowing where to turn.

We think it's time that communities come together to play their part in helping people who live with mental illness. You can have a read more about this in our 'Building communities that care' report by clicking the following link: www.rethink.org/campaigns-and-policy/campaign-with-us/resources-and-reports/communities-that-care

It's important to remember, that recovery is possible when you have the correct knowledge and support. This includes receiving support from others like your friends, family, your care team, or keyworker. Without support from others recovery can sometimes be difficult.

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2. What can help me recover?

There are different things that may help you recover. You should recover in a way that works for you. There is no right or wrong way to do so, it is a personal journey.

Some people call this process a 'recovery journey.'

The following areas may be helpful for you to explore as part of your recovery journey.

- NHS support
- Social care support
- Hope
- Acceptance
- Control
- Identifying your values and setting achievable goals
- Stability
- Relationships
- Support groups
- Lifestyle
- Rewarding yourself

There is more information about each of the above in this factsheet.

What support does the NHS provide?

There are different types of support and treatment that you can get from the NHS.

There are different services in the NHS that can support and treat you. The right one for you depends on the mental illness you have, and how bad your symptoms are.

These services include:

- GP services,
- Local NHS talking therapy services,
- Specialist NHS mental health teams,
- Crisis services, and
- Hospital services.

You can find more information about:

- Talking therapies
- NHS mental health teams
- Medication - Choice and managing problems
- Going into hospital for mental health treatment

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

What is social prescribing?³

Social prescribing uses non-medical options to help improve your wellbeing.

You can talk to your GP about seeing a link worker. Link workers aren't yet available in all areas of the country. The NHS aimed to have 1,000 link workers in place by 2021. The NHS say there will be more link workers in place by 2024.⁴

A link worker will work with you to find out what is important to you.⁵ They can connect you with local support such as:

- activity groups,
- support groups,
- services, such as charities, and
- social services.

What are recovery colleges?

Recovery colleges are part of the NHS. They offer free courses about mental health to help you manage your symptoms. They can help you to take control of your wellbeing and recovery.

The courses are usually short term, and length can vary from 1 day up to 8 weeks.⁶

You can usually self-refer to a recovery college.

Recovery colleges are designed to be person-centred. This means that if you attend a recovery college course you are involved in deciding what you learn.

Recovery colleges often support students to lead their own recovery.

Recovery colleges are available in most areas. To see if there is a one in your area you can:

- search online at the following link:
<https://mindrecoverynet.org.uk/search>
- search on the internet, or
- call NHS 111.

What is social care support?

You may be entitled to get help from social services. Social care support can include support to help you to do things like:⁷

- get out of the house,
- keep in touch with friends and family,
- get a job or take part in education,
- prepare meals or go shopping, and
- manage money.

You're entitled to a social care assessment to see if you qualify for social care support and what your needs are. With more support you may feel more able to take control of your recovery.

If you qualify for social care support, you are entitled to a care plan.⁸ You should be involved in making your care plan, and you should be in control of planning your support.⁹

Being in control of your care planning can help you to reach your recovery goals.

You can find more information about:

- Social care assessment - Under the Care Act 2014
- Social care - Care and support planning under the Care Act 2014

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

How is hope important to recovery?

Hope is an important part of recovery. You might find it helpful to read stories from people about their recovery.

You can look at the following websites as a first step:

- www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/blogs
- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories

You could join a support group. A support group is where people come together to share information, experiences and give each other support. Support groups can be face-to-face or online.

See [support groups](#) later in this factsheet for more information about how to find a group.

You could also contact an emotional support line for support. Sometimes speaking to someone else can help you feel more hopeful when you're not feeling your best. You can find a list of emotional support lines in the [Useful contacts](#) section at the end of this factsheet.

How can acceptance help?

We understand that for some people it can be difficult to be diagnosed with a mental illness.

Some people have found that their recovery journey is easier after they learn to accept their illness and the difficulties it causes.

It can sometimes be useful to recognise the challenges your illness causes you. You can think about how they affect your life, what you can do to overcome them and what help you need.

It may be helpful for you to also focus on what you can do. You are more likely to reach your goal if it is something you can achieve.

Acceptance may help you to make positive changes and help you to reach new goals.

It might help you to:

- read about your illness or symptoms,
- talk to other people with similar issues, or who have the same diagnosis as you, and
- read, watch or listen to self-help content.

See [support groups](#) later in this factsheet for more information about how to find a group.

Why is control important?

Whilst it's difficult to take control of everything, you may find it is helpful to focus on the things you can control.

It may be helpful to think about these questions.

- What makes me happy?
- How can I be happier?
- What do I want to change in my life by this time next year?
- How can I do it?
- Do I need support to do it?
- Who can support me?

Control may mean that you are more involved with your medication and treatment options. Speak to your family, doctor, or other health professionals if you want more support.

You can find more information about:

- Medication - Choices and managing problems

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

What is a mood diary?

Keeping a diary or log of your mental health for a few weeks may be helpful.

You could use this diary to reflect on things that happen that may affect your mental health. This may help you to take control of your symptoms.

You can include things like:

- When do you feel mentally unwell or stressed?
- What happened just before you felt this way?
- What thoughts or beliefs went through your mind?
- Were you on your own or with someone?
- How did you cope with your feelings?
- Did your actions help in the short or long term?

The mood diary could also help you to identify things which can make you unwell. These things are known as 'triggers.' Identifying your triggers can help you to have more control over your stress levels.

There is a template for a mood diary in the [Checklist](#) section at the end of this factsheet.

What can I do to achieve goals?

Setting achievable goals can help in your recovery.

To help you to set yourself a goal, think about what is important to you.

For example, a goal you might have is to make new friends or change your job.

Make sure that you set goals that you'll be able to achieve. If a goal is too hard to achieve it might have a negative impact on your mental wellbeing.

You can think about making SMART goals. SMART stands for:

- **Simple** – is your goal simple to follow?
- **Meaningful** – does your goal mean something to you?
- **Achievable** – is your goal achievable? Is it something you can do?
- **Realistic** – is your goal appropriate for you? If so, how will you do it?
- **Time-limited** – make sure you set a date of when you want to achieve this goal. This can help keep you accountable.

It can be helpful think about the advice you would give to someone else experiencing similar problems.

Below is an example of a SMART plan.

Peter's plan

What is your specific goal?

- To always cook at least 3 healthy meals per week by the end of the next 6 months.

Why is this goal meaningful to you?

- A healthy diet is good for my physical health and cooking can be good for mental wellbeing too. I can learn new recipes and cooking skills.

Is this goal achievable?

- My goal is achievable as it's only 3 meals a week and realistic to the time I've got available. It doesn't seem too stressful.

How are you going to prepare for this activity?

- I'm going to work out what ingredients I need for the meals. I'm going to plan how long the meals will take to cook, and on what days I'll do it. I'll make sure I leave myself enough time to prepare, cook and eat the meals.

What is your deadline?

- I am going aim to cook at least:
 - 1 healthy meals a week by 2 months' time,
 - 2 healthy meals a week by 4 months' time, and
 - 3 healthy meals a week by 6 months' time.
- This is realistic and gives me time to get used to cooking. If it goes well, I might do more.

How will you do this activity?

- I am going to find healthy, affordable and easy recipes to cook. I will search on the internet for them.
- I am going to buy the ingredients for this meal when I go shopping with my support worker.

What will you do when you have finished your task?

- I will acknowledge that I have achieved something which I found difficult. I will reward myself by going out for a meal with my brother. And let someone else do the cooking for a change! I will think about if I can cook more meals a week.

What will you do if you haven't stuck to your deadline?

- I will be kind to myself and I will make a new realistic deadline.

What advice can I get about money and housing issues?

Money and housing worries can cause a lot of stress for anyone. And if you're living with a mental illness they can make your condition worse.

Secure finances and a suitable place to live are an important part of recovery.

It's important to get help early if you start to have money or housing problems. If you ignore issues, they are unlikely to go away and may get worse.

If you find it difficult to manage your money due to your mental health you can take a look at the following website:

www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en/managing-money/how-do-i-manage-my-money-if-i-have-mental-health-problems

You can find more information about '**Housing options**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

You can find more information about **‘Managing money with a mental health condition’** and **‘Options for dealing with debt’** at: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/money-benefits-and-mental-health

These guides include organisations you can contact for free housing and money advice.

How can I stay in contact with people?

It can help your recovery to stay in contact with people who can help you stay well. You can stay in contact with people the following ways.

- Face to face. You could visit a friend or loved one.
- Online. You can use a free online app such as ‘Zoom’ or ‘WhatsApp’ to speak to family or friends.
- Online forums. This is where people talk about a particular subject. For example, if you’re interested in cars you can join a forum where people discuss them.
- Phone.
- Text message.
- Email.
- Letter.

You don’t have to talk about your mental illness unless you want to.

Below are some things you can do if you want to make more contact with other people.

- Get back in touch with people you already know.
- Join support groups. See [support groups](#) later in this factsheet for more information about how to find a group.
- Join online forums.
- Join social groups such as through ‘Meet up.’ Their website is www.meetup.com
- Join a recovery college. See the information on [recovery colleges](#) above.
- Volunteer. You can find more information about volunteering and opportunities on the following websites: www.volunteermatters.org.uk, www.ncvo.org.uk and www.do-it.org.uk
- Contact a befriending service.
- Look for local classes or clubs that interest you. You can usually find information on these on the internet, on your local authority’s website and in your local library.
- Get into work or training.

You can find more information about '**Work and mental illness – Getting a job**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

How can friends and family support me?

You could tell loved ones about any care plans and goals that you have and any support you need.

They may be able to offer you better support if they understand your illness. You could suggest that they read information about your illness.

We have information on different mental health conditions on our website here: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions

You and your family may also find family intervention useful.

What is family intervention?¹⁰

Family intervention is offered through the NHS for people who experience psychosis or schizophrenia.

In family therapy you and your family work with mental health professionals. The goal is to improve all family members' mental health and understanding of your condition. It helps you and your family to develop problem solving skills to help with relationship issues.

This should be offered to people who you live with or who you are in close contact with.

The support that you and your family are given will depend on what problems there are and what preferences you all have. This could be group family sessions or individual sessions.

Your family should get support for 3 months to 1 year and should have at least 10 planned sessions.

How can I think about how relationships affect me?¹¹

Relationships are important to all of us. They can affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing.

If you're connected to your loved ones and community, you're more likely to be happier, physically, and mentally healthier.

The quality of your close relationships is as important as the amount of friends you have.

The following links contain some helpful advice about relationships:

Guide to investing in relationships:

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Relationships-21st-Century-Summary-Report.pdf

Tips for building a healthy romantic relationship:

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/relationship-help.htm>

What are support groups?

Support groups:

- are where you can share experiences with others and get mutual support,
- can be a good way to help yourself,
- may give you hope for the future or help you to take control of your life, and
- can be face-to-face or online.

You can search for local support groups below:

- **Rethink Mental Illness:** www.rethink.org/about-us/our-support-groups
- **Local Minds:** www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds
- **Bipolar UK:** www.bipolaruk.org/find-a-support-group
- **Carers Trust** for support groups and services for carers: <https://carers.org/help-and-info/carers-services-near-you>

There are also online support services:

- **Side by Side:** <https://sidebyside.mind.org.uk>
- **7 Cups:** www.7cups.com
- **Mentell** for adult men: www.mentell.org.uk
- **Together All:** <https://togetherall.com/en-gb>
- **Sane:** www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum

What are emotional support lines?

You can contact emotional support lines, that are also known as listening services. They are a place that you can say how you are feeling to someone who is trained to listen.

Emotional support lines aren't the same as counselling. Counselling is a type of talking treatment.

You can find a list of emotional support lines in the [Useful contacts](#) section at the end of this factsheet.

How can lifestyle changes help?

Making small lifestyle changes can improve your wellbeing and can help your recovery.

How can having a routine help?

Routine may help to improve or maintain your mental wellbeing. It can help to give a structure to your day and may give you a sense of purpose or achieve goals.

This could be a simple routine. Such as eating and going to bed at the same time each day.

If it helps, you can write down what you want to do.

It might help to think about changes to your routine that will improve your life.

John's Story

John lives with depression. He has noticed that he can manage his condition well if he has regular exercise and sleep.

John exercises for at least 30 minutes a day. He walks to his local shop to buy his milk and newspaper on most days. If the weather is bad, John uses a strong wooden box to step up and down from while he watches the television.

John knows that his mood will go low if he doesn't get regular sleep. He monitors his sleep with a diary and has a set bedtime routine, which helps.

John meditates before he goes to bed. He doesn't do this every night. He finds it helpful if he has a stressful day.

Learn something new

New activities can help you to learn new skills and meet new people.

You can also include time for your new activity into your daily or weekly routine.

To learn new skills, you could try the following.

- Volunteer
- Study
- Get a job
- Talk to your employer about new things that you can learn as part of your job
- Do housework or gardening

- Learn a new hobby
- Go to a class
- Get a pet
- Exercise

Sleep

Sleep is very important. Your mental health symptoms may feel worse if you are tired.

Not getting enough sleep can cause problems such as poor concentration and low mood.

Sleep issues can lead to you being more likely to experience anxiety or depression. For some it can lead to suicidal thoughts or trigger episodes of psychosis.¹²

If you have mental health issues it can affect sleep.

If you have issues with sleep, you can:

- talk to your doctor,
- refer yourself for NHS talking therapy, or
- practice sleep hygiene.

Sleep hygiene means things like:

- having a regular bedtime routine,
- only using your bed for sleep,
- exercising regularly but avoiding lots of exercise too close to bedtime,
- cutting down on caffeine, especially in the evening,
- making sure the place you sleep is a comfortable temperature,
- making sure the place you sleep is dark,
- not using your phone or computer immediately before bedtime, and
- making sure that the place you sleep is tidy.

You can find out more about how to improve your sleep at:

- www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/wellbeing-physical-health/how-can-i-improve-my-sleep
- www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/why-am-i-tired-all-the-time

Eat well

Eating well can help you feel better mentally as well as physically.

Eating well will mean something different to different people. Generally, it means.¹³

- Your weight stays normal. Not too low or too high for your height.
- Your weight stays stable. Not going up and down all the time.
- You eat the necessary food groups regularly, such as fruit and vegetables.
- Eating is enjoyable.

The following links have more information eating well. You may find them helpful:

- NHS Eat Well Guide: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well
- Mental Health Foundation briefing on mental health and nutrition: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-04/food-for-thought-mental-health-nutrition-briefing-march-2017.pdf

Exercise

Exercise can improve your mental health. It can help with depression and anxiety and symptoms such as:¹⁴

- negative mood,
- low self-esteem,
- social withdrawal, and
- not thinking clearly.

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommend exercise as a treatment for depression.¹⁵

GP's can prescribe exercise in some areas in the UK. They do this by helping you get a free or reduced rate gym membership. This is part of social prescribing. See [social prescribing](#) in this factsheet for more information.

If you need some support to start exercising you could look at the information on the 'We are undefeatable' website. We are undefeatable is an exercise campaign that Rethink Mental Illness is involved with.

Click the following link for more information:

<https://weareundefeatable.co.uk>

You can read more about **Physical activity and mental health** here:

www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/wellbeing-physical-health/physical-activity-and-mental-health

You can read more about Exercise for depression here:
www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/exercise-for-depression

Reward yourself

You can reward yourself for any positive changes you make.

Remember to congratulate yourself for any achievement. And be kind to yourself when you haven't achieved a goal.

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Further Reading

Wellness actions plans

You can read more about wellness action plans here: <https://mentalhealth-uk.org/blog/wellbeing-workplan>.

You can see an example of a wellness action plan here:
<https://mhukcdn.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/26122110/MHUK-My-Wellbeing-plan.pdf>.

Staying well with bipolar guide. Rethink Mental Illness.

Staying well with bipolar is a guide based on the research conducted by Rethink Mental Illness. It is based on the personal experiences and learning of 32 people

Website: www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/treatment-and-support/staying-well-with-bipolar

Live your best working life. Mental Health Foundation

A healthy work-life balance will mean different things to us all. It's not so much about splitting your time 50/50 between work and leisure but making sure you feel fulfilled and content in both areas of your life. This guide provides advice on this.

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/work-life-balance

Recovery Star

Developed by the Mental Health Providers Forum, the recovery star programme allows people to measure their recovery progress.

Website: www.mentalhealthpartnerships.com/resource/recovery-star

Emotional Support lines

Samaritans

Can be contacted by telephone, letter, e-mail and online chat. There's also a face-to-face service, available at their local branches. They are open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Telephone: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

Sane Line

Work with anyone affected by mental illness, including families, friends and carers. They provide a free text-based support service called Textcare and an online supportive forum community where anyone can share their experiences of mental health.

Telephone: 0300 304 7000

Textcare: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare

Support Forum: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum

Website: www.sane.org.uk

Support Line

They offer confidential emotional support to children, young adults and adults by telephone, email and post. They work with callers to develop healthy, positive coping strategies, an inner feeling of strength and increased self-esteem to encourage healing, recovery and moving forward with life.

Telephone: 01708 765200

E-mail: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Papyrus UK

Work with people under 35 who are having suicidal feelings. And with people who are worried about someone under 35.

Telephone: 0800 068 41 41

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Text: 07860 039967

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

C.A.L.M. (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

Aimed specifically at men.

Telephone: 0800 58 58 58

Webchat: through the website

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Silverline

Aimed at people over 55. The Silver Line operates the only confidential, free helpline for older people across the UK. They also offer telephone friendship where we match volunteers with older people based on their interests, facilitated group calls, and help to connect people with local services in their area.

Telephone: 0800 4 70 80 90

Website: www.thesilverline.org.uk

The Mix

Aimed at people under 25.

Telephone: 0808 808 4994

E-mail: through the website.

Crisis text message service: Text **THEMIX** to 85258

Webchat: through the website.

Website: www.themix.org.uk

Mood Swings

Aimed at anyone affected by a mood disorder, including friends, families and carers.

Telephone: 0161 832 37 36

E-mail: info@moodswings.org.uk

Website: www.moodswings.org.uk

If you are in crisis, you can contact the following text support service for help and support:

Shout

If you're experiencing a personal crisis, are unable to cope and need support, text Shout to 85258. Shout can help with urgent issues such as suicidal thoughts, abuse or assault, self-harm, bullying and relationship challenges.

Text: Text Shout to 85258

Website: <https://giveusashout.org>

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Checklist

Mood diary

Date and Time	What happened to make you feel unwell or stressed? Who were you with? What was your mind telling you?	Level of reaction. Give it a number of 1-5 1 = coped well 5=coped badly	How did you react?	How did you cope with your feelings after the event?

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