

Worried about your mental health?

How to get treatment and support

This factsheet explains how you can get help if you are worried about your mental health. It explains about options for treatment and support. Such as seeing your GP, talking therapy, self-help and support from charities. This factsheet is for anyone who is 18 and over, living in England and worried about their mental health.

Key points:

- Mental health problems are common. Around 1 in 4 people have experienced mental illness.
- You may want support if you have noticed changes in the way you think or feel which cause problems in your day-to-day life.
- If you think you need help, it is best to get support and treatment as soon as you can. Seeking help early can speed up your recovery.
- You can get support and treatment from the NHS and from other places too. There are also things you can do to help yourself.

This factsheet covers:

1. How common are mental health problems?
2. What are common symptoms of mental illness?
3. What help can I get help from the NHS?
4. What if I have problems getting help from the NHS?
5. What other help can I get?
6. Can people recover from mental illness?

1. How common are mental health problems?

Mental health problems are common. Around 1 in 4 people have experienced mental illness.¹

Stressful events such as losing a job, relationship issues, bereavement or money issues can lead to mental illness. But there can be other factors, like a family history of mental illness.

Most people who live with mental illness have mild to moderate symptoms and conditions such as anxiety disorder or depression. But some people experience severe symptoms of these conditions.

Others also live with less common but challenging conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or personality disorders.

You can find more information about:

- Anxiety disorders
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD)
- Depression
- Dissociation and dissociative disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Personality disorders
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Psychosis
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Stress – how to cope

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

2. What are common symptoms of mental illness?

Most people will feel low, anxious, or irritable at some point in their lives. But if you have several symptoms at the same time, this could mean you have a mental illness. Especially if you have had them for some time.

Your symptoms might be having a significant effect on your day-to-day life. It could also be a sign that you are experiencing mental illness.

The following symptoms could be signs of mental health problems.

- Being anxious and irritable.
- Having a low mood.
- Finding it difficult to concentrate or remember things.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Changes in your mood.
- Finding it difficult to manage everyday life. For example, preparing food and washing regularly.
- Feeling teary.
- Becoming suspicious or paranoid.
- Becoming isolated and withdrawn.
- Having suicidal thoughts.
- Believing that your family and friends want to do you harm.
- Believing that people or organisations are out to get you.
- Experiencing hallucinations. This means sensing things that other people do not, including seeing and hearing things.
- Believing that you have special powers or are on a mission.
- Excessive spending and problems managing your money.
- Having flashbacks or nightmares after a traumatic event.

These feelings can often be distressing and hard to cope with. But with the right support and help you can make positive steps towards recovery.

3. What help can I get from the NHS?

Getting help as early as possible is a good idea if you are worried about your mental health. The sooner you get help and treatment, the quicker you will start to recover.

What help can my GP give me?

You can visit your GP to discuss your options for help and treatment.

GPs are experienced in dealing with mental health problems, so try to be open about how you have been feeling.

Your GP can:

- offer you suitable medication,
- refer you to NHS talking therapy services or explain how you can refer yourself,

- give you advice on things like sleep, exercise and diet, and
- refer you to a specialist NHS mental health service, such as the community mental health team (CMHT).

Your GP might refer you to a specialist NHS mental health team if they:

- have tried all options available to them and you are still very unwell,
- think your symptoms are severe, or
- feel you are at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Some mental health conditions need to be diagnosed by a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is part of the community mental health team (CMHT).

How can I prepare to see a GP?

You can do the following things.

- Ask if there is a GP in the practice who has a mental health interest and try to see that GP.
- Ask for a double appointment if you need more time to talk about how you are feeling or your symptoms. GP appointments only normally last up to 10 minutes.
- Write down how you have been feeling over time and what your symptoms are. This could help you tell the GP everything you want to say.
- Think about what you would like to try and achieve by the end of the appointment.
- Ask someone you trust to go with you.

Can my GP share information about me with others?

Your GP should keep information about you confidential.² This means that they should not give information about you to anyone else, unless you agree to it.

But there are times when your GP can share information about you without your consent, such as:³

- you lack mental capacity and it's in your best interests,
- it is required by law, or
- it is in the public interest.

You can find more about:

- GPs and your mental health
- Talking therapies

- NHS mental health teams
- Confidentiality and your mental health information

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

What are NHS talking therapy services?

NHS talking therapy services:

- Provide talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), group therapy and counselling
- Sometimes provide a treatment called eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) for trauma-based conditions, including PTSD
- Usually provide online tools too
- Treat mild to moderate anxiety and depression, and related conditions
- Are free to use
- Are available in all areas of England

You can self-refer to your local NHS talking therapies service. This means that you can contact them directly to get an appointment, so you do not have to see your GP to do this.

Your local service can tell you what therapies are available and how long you might have to wait to get it.

You will normally get a telephone assessment to begin with to talk about your condition and symptoms. This will help the service to decide if it is right for you and what therapies are suitable.

The service will only treat mild to moderate mental health symptoms. The service might think that you have severe or complex symptoms. If they do, they will refer you to a specialist NHS mental health team. Or say you should see your GP to get a referral.

You can find your local NHS talking therapy service by:

- searching on the following NHS website: www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/nhs-talking-therapies,
- calling NHS 111 and asking, or
- asking your GP.

You can find more information about **Talking therapies** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

Where can I get help if I am having a mental health crisis?

Being in crisis means that your mental health is very bad, so you might need urgent support and treatment.

If you need urgent help, you can do the following.

- **Contact NHS 111 for urgent mental health support:** You can call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-mental-health-symptoms. You will need to answer some questions. They will refer you to an appropriate service or tell you what to do next. Depending on your symptoms, they might:
 - Advise you to call 999 or go to A&E in an emergency
 - Go to an urgent treatment centre
 - Refer you to an NHS urgent specialist mental health team
 - Book a callback from a nurse
 - Advise you to see an evening and weekend GP
 - Give you advice on how to look after yourself
- **Ask your GP for an emergency appointment.** GPs usually keep some appointments free for urgent cases. The GP can make a referral to the local crisis team if necessary.
- **Go to the accident and emergency (A&E)** of the local hospital. A&E will assess the situation and may arrange for a mental health professional to see you. You could get admitted to a mental health ward in hospital or referred to the crisis team.
- **You can call the emergency services on 999** if you cannot get to A&E. They may then get in touch with mental health services such as the crisis team or take you to A&E.

What other crisis services might be available?

Other local services are provided in some areas by the NHS and other providers, such as charities. These local services can include:

- crisis houses that provide short-term accommodation for people experiencing a mental health crisis,
- crisis cafés that provide a safe, welcoming place where people can go if they are feeling emotionally distressed or are in a mental health crisis,
- crisis helplines that provide emotional and sometimes practical support, and
- emotional support lines where you can talk to skilled listeners about how you're feeling. See section 5 of this factsheet for some examples of support lines.

You can ask NHS 111 about your local services.

Rethink Mental Illness provide some of these services in some areas. You can click the **Help in your area** link on our website to search: www.rethink.org.

4. What if I have problems getting help from the NHS?

You might have seen your GP or NHS talking therapy services. But you might not be happy with how they dealt with you.

If this happens you can:

- make an appointment with a different GP,
- change GP surgeries,
- get a community advocate to help make your views and wishes heard,
- get a friend or relative to help you or go to an appointment with you,
- speak to your local patient advice and liaison service (PALS),
- make a complaint, or
- get an NHS complaints advocate to help you complain.

You can find more information about:

- Advocacy for mental health – Making your voice heard
- Complaining about the NHS and social services

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

5. What other help can I get?

There are other options for help other than support from the NHS.

How can I get private talking therapy?

Private therapy is therapy that is not provided or funded by the NHS. You will have to pay for it yourself or you may have cover through an insurance policy.

The cost of therapy will be different across the country and by therapist. You can ask about charges and agree a price before you start your therapy sessions.

You may get a free first session, or get lower rates for students, job seekers or if you are on a low income.

What should I look for when choosing a therapist?

We always advise that you find a therapist who is a member of a professional body. This means that they will meet certain standards, have a complaints procedure, and follow a

code of ethics. You can search for private therapists in your local area on the following websites:

- **British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists:** www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists
- **UK Council for Psychotherapy:** www.psychotherapy.org.uk
- **Counselling Directory:** www.counselling-directory.org.uk

How can I get talking therapy through a charity?

You can search online to see if you can find any charities that provide free or low-cost talking therapy. You can try terms such as:

- 'free counselling in Camden' or
- 'low cost counselling in Leicestershire'

You can find more information about **Talking therapies** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

What are complementary and alternative treatments?

Complementary and alternative therapies are health-related therapies that are not part of mainstream medical care.

They are thought to increase wellbeing, aid relaxation, and promote good mental health. You can use complementary and alternative therapies for different mental health needs and symptoms. Examples are:

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Herbal medicine
- Homeopathy
- Massage
- Meditation
- Spiritual or energy healing
- Yoga

You can find out more about **Complementary and alternative treatments for mental health** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

What can I do to help myself?

There are things that you can do to help yourself. Everyone is different, so you can find out what works for you.

You can:

- **Learn ways to relax.** Such as listening to a meditation podcast or relaxing music. You can find free meditation videos on websites like YouTube.
- **Practise mindfulness and meditation.** You can get more information here: www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/what-is-mindfulness
- **Eat healthy foods and have a balanced diet.** You can get more information here: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well
- **Keep physically active.** Exercise can help to reduce stress and anxiety. It can increase the levels of serotonin and endorphins which are your body's natural 'happy' chemicals.⁴ You can get more information here: www.weareundefeatable.co.uk and see **Physical activity and mental health** at www.rethink.org
- **Choose healthier drinks and make sure you are hydrated.** You can get more information here: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/water-drinks-nutrition
- **Have a daily routine.** Keeping a routine can help you to keep your mind occupied and focused on healthy thoughts and activities.
- **Have healthy relationships.** You can get more information here: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/guide-investing-your-relationships
- **Have enough sleep.** Without regular sleep, your mental health can be affected. You can get more information see on **How can I improve my sleep?** at www.rethink.org
- **Avoiding alcohol, drinking only moderately or cutting down.** You can get more information on **Drugs, alcohol, and mental health** at www.rethink.org
- **Avoiding smoking or cutting down.** You can get more information on **Smoking and mental health** at www.rethink.org
- **Keep a mood diary.** This may help you to be more aware of your symptoms and what makes you better and worse. You can simply use a notebook for this. Or you may want to try online resources or smartphone apps.

You can read more about how physical health and lifestyle changes below:

- **Wellbeing and physical health.** www.rethink.org
- **Physical and mental health.** Look at 'lifestyle factors.' www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/p/physical-health-and-mental-health

Can I get self-help online?

There are websites which give information about how to manage your mental health. There are also websites which explain how you can use cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to improve and manage your mental health.

Some people find these useful:

- **Public Health England – Every Mind Matters:** www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters
- **ieso:** online CBT. Only certain NHS trusts: www.iesohealth.com
- **Live life to the Full:** Online courses: littf.com/?section=page&page_seq=8
- **Mind app library:** apps recommended by the charity Mind: mind.orchaealth.com

What are breathing exercises?

Breathing exercises can help make you feel calmer and reduce stress. You will get the most benefit if you do them regularly, as part of your daily routine.⁵

Breathing exercises usually benefit wellbeing. But if they are not working for you, or are causing you difficulty, stop using them. You can try other relaxation techniques.

Below are some exercises you can try.

Slow breathing

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Keep your back straight and your shoulders back.
- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.
- Think about how your breathing feels in your body.
- Can you feel it coming in through your nostrils?
- Can you feel it going down your throat and into your lungs?
- Slow down your breathing as much as you can.
- You may find it useful to count as you inhale and exhale.
- See if you can expand your exhale, to make it longer than your inhale. Can you feel your chest expanding? What about your belly?
- If you start to have upsetting thoughts, try bringing your focus back to your breathing.

Box breathing⁶

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Put on some relaxing music if you want.
- Take one deep breath in and out.
- Breathe in for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Breathe out for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Repeat this cycle for as long as you want to.

4-7-8 method⁷

- Start by sitting up straight in a comfortable position or lying down.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. If you can't breathe in through your nose, use your mouth.
- Hold your breath for 7 seconds.
- Breathe out slowly for 8 seconds.
- Repeat this cycle up to 3 more times. While you do it try to concentrate on your breathing.

How can I get emotional support?

Talking about your mental health can have big benefits. And people who care about you like friends and family are usually happy to listen and support you. But you can also call the following lines to talk about how you are feeling.

Samaritans

They offer emotional support for people in a crisis, available 24 hours a day.

Phone: 116 123

Address: Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org



Sane

Work with anyone affected by mental illness, including families, friends and carers. They also provide a free text-based support service called Textcare.

Phone: 0300 304 7000

Call back service: 0300 124 7900

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

Website: www.sane.org.uk

Support Line

They offer confidential emotional support by telephone, email and post. Their opening hours vary so you need to ring them for details.

Phone: 01708 765200

Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Address: PO Box 13594, Sudbury, CO10 3FB

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

CALM is leading a movement against suicide. They offer accredited confidential, anonymous and free support, information and signposting to people anywhere in the UK through their helpline and webchat service.

Phone: 0800 58 58 58

Whatsapp: www.thecalmzone.net/whatsapp

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Papyrus UK

Charity that offers emotional support to people under 35 who are suicidal. They can also support people who are concerned about someone under 35 who might be suicidal.

Phone: 0800 068 41 41

Text: 88247

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org webchat available

The Mix

If you are under 25 and in crisis, text the Mix for free. They will explore your situation with you and find organisations that may be able to help you further. They also offer a phone counselling service, support groups and discussion forums.

Crisis messenger: Text THEMIX to 85258

Website: www.themix.org.uk

What are support groups?

Support groups are where people with similar issues share experiences with others and get mutual support.

You can search for local mental health support groups below:

- **Rethink Mental Illness:** www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups
- **Local Minds:** www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds

There are also online support services, such as:

- **Side by Side:** sidebyside.mind.org.uk

6. Can people recover from mental illness?

Recovery can mean different things to different people. But with support and treatment symptoms of mental illness can improve.

If you are concerned about your mental health, you can consider the options in this factsheet. Remember that many services and organisations are there to help and support you.

You can find more information about **Recovery and mental illness** at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

Useful Contacts

Hub of Hope

The UK's largest mental health support directory.

Website: hubofhope.co.uk

References

¹ NHS Digital. *Health survey for England, 2014/ Summary*. See 'Highlights', 'Mental Health Problems.' digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/health-survey-for-england-2014 (accessed 13th March 2025).

² General Medical Council (2017). *Confidentiality: good practice in handling patient information*. See 'Ethical and legal duties of confidentiality', para 2. www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/confidentiality.asp (accessed 13th March 2025).

³ General Medical Council. (2017). *Confidentiality: good practice in handling patient information*. See 'When you can disclose personal information', para 9. www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/30610.asp (accessed 13th March 2025).

⁴ Al-Zubaidi, Dr H. (on behalf of NHS England). 2022. *Movement is medicine*. See 'What are the wellbeing benefits of exercise?' point 3 * end note. www.england.nhs.uk/blog/movement-is-medicine/ (accessed 19th March 2025).

⁵ NHS. *Breathing exercise for stress*. www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/ (accessed 13th March 2025).

⁶ British Heart Foundation. 2023. *3 breathing exercises to relieve stress*. See '1. Box breathing'. www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/breathing-exercises#box (accessed 19th March 2025).

⁷ British Heart Foundation. 2023. *3 breathing exercises to relieve stress*. See '2. The 4-7-8 breathing technique'. www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/breathing-exercises#478 (accessed 19th March 2025).

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This factsheet is available
in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice and Information Service

Phone: **0808 801 0525**

Monday to Friday 9:30am – 4pm
excluding bank holidays.

Webchat service available

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you or if you found any issues with it. Drop us a line at:

feedback@rethink.org

Or write to us at:

Rethink Mental Illness,
28 Albert Embankment,
London, SE1 7GR.



We are the charity for people severely affected by mental illness, no matter what they're going through.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone: **0121 522 7007**
Email: info@rethink.org



Need more help?

Go to www.rethink.org for information on Mental health conditions and symptoms, treatment and support, physical health and wellbeing, ethnic minorities and mental health, LGBT+ mental health, mental health laws and rights, work, studying, and mental health, police, courts, and prison, and advice for carers.

Do not have access to the web?

Call us on **0121 522 7007**. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Do you have accessibility tools for this information?

You can find this information on our website at www.rethink.org. There is an accessibility function on this webpage called **Recite**. On the desktop site, click on the icon in the top right-hand corner next to 'Donate.' On the mobile site, scroll right and click on the 'Turn on accessibility' icon.

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