

# INFORMATION ABOUT A RANGE OF MENTAL ILLNESSES

## Anxiety

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a word we use to describe feelings of unease, worry and fear. It incorporates both the emotions and the physical sensations we might experience when we are worried or nervous about something. Although we usually find it unpleasant, anxiety is related to the 'fight or flight' response – our normal biological reaction to feeling threatened.

Because anxiety is a normal human experience, it's sometimes hard to know when it's becoming a problem for you – but if your feelings of anxiety are very strong, or last for a long time, it can be overwhelming.

### *The most common anxiety disorders are:*

- **generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)** – general, sustained feelings of anxiousness and fear not linked to one specific cause.
- **panic disorder** – sufferers experience regular panic attacks not related to one specific cause.
- **obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** – obsessive-compulsive disorder is a diagnosis given when anxiety leads someone to experience both:
  - **obsessions** – unwelcome thoughts, images, urges or doubts that repeatedly appear in the sufferer's mind
  - **compulsions** – repetitive activities that the sufferer feels they have to do.
- **phobias** – an intense fear of something, even when that thing is very unlikely to be dangerous
- **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** – strong feelings of anxiety after experiencing or witnessing something traumatic. PTSD can cause flashbacks or nightmares about the traumatic event.

## What are the symptoms of anxiety?

If you experience anxiety, you might find that you identify with some of the physical and psychological sensations in the table below. Anxiety can feel different for different people, so you might also experience other kinds of feelings, which aren't listed here.

### Physical Sensations

### Psychological Sensations

nausea (feeling sick)	feeling tense, nervous and on edge
tense muscles and headaches	having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst
pins and needles	feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
feeling light headed or dizzy	feeling like other people can see you're anxious and are looking at you
faster breathing	feeling your mind is really busy with thoughts
sweating or hot flushes	dwelling on negative experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again (this is called rumination)
a fast, thumping or irregular heart beat	feeling restless and not being able to concentrate
raised blood pressure	feeling numb
difficulty sleeping	
needing the toilet more frequently, or less frequently	
churning in the pit of your stomach	
you might experience a panic attack	

## What causes anxiety?

It's hard to know why some people experience anxiety as a mental health problem and others don't. If you worry more than others it could also just feel like part of your personality – or it could be a mixture of these things. Sometimes you might not know why you feel anxious at all, and it might not seem to have any obvious cause.

There are many situations which commonly trigger anxious thoughts and feelings, for example:

- moving into a new class
- sitting a test or an exam
- going into hospital
- disputes with friends
- the loss of a loved one
- parental separation

For most people these anxious thoughts and feelings resolve. However, for others, they may persist and require professional support to overcome.

# Anxiety

## How can anxiety be treated?

The most common treatments for anxiety and panic disorders are:

**Talking treatments** – counselling or therapy to understand the causes of anxiety and find strategies to manage it. There are lots of different types of talking treatments available, but the most commonly prescribed talking treatment for anxiety is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), because there is reliable evidence that it can be effective.

CBT is a particular type of talking treatment which aims to identify connections between thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and help the sufferer develop practical skills to manage these more positively.

**Self-help resources** – Self-help resources are tools that have been developed by health care professionals for sufferers to use by themselves, and can be helpful in managing anxiety. They can be in the form of workbooks or computer programmes such as *Fear Fighter*. *Fear Fighter* is a

computer-based CBT (CCBT) programme for treating anxiety, panic and phobias, which is freely available on prescription through the NHS.

**Medication** – Medication is sometimes prescribed alongside talking treatments. Medication cannot tackle the cause of anxiety but it can help to relieve the symptoms which can be important to enable sufferers to access treatment or continue with daily life.

The most commonly prescribed medications are

- **Antidepressants** which can help people to feel calmer. There are many different types and it's common to need to try a couple of different types to find out what works best.
- **Beta-Blockers** which can treat some of the physical symptoms of anxiety and help us to feel calmer.
- **Tranquilisers** which are a short term measure for helping to manage the physical symptoms of especially debilitating anxiety or panic.

## Further information

**Anxiety UK**

tel: 0844 477 5774

web: [anxietyuk.org.uk](http://anxietyuk.org.uk)

Support, help and information for those with anxiety disorders.

# Depression

## What is depression?

People often use the term depressed to mean feeling down or sad, but for most people these feelings pass relatively quickly. When these feelings persist over weeks or months and when they have an impact on someone's ability to carry on with normal activities like going to school then they may be given a clinical diagnosis of depression.

## *What are the symptoms of depression?*

The symptoms are different for different people but there are some more common symptoms including:

### Feelings

- Low-spirited for much of the time, every day
- Restless and agitated becomes tearful easily
- Numb, empty and full of despair
- Isolated and unable to relate to other people
- Unusually irritable or impatient
- Finds no pleasure in life or things they usually enjoy
- Feels helpless

### Behaviour

- Not doing activities they usually enjoy
- Avoiding social events
- Cut themselves off from others and can't ask for help
- Self-harming
- Finds it difficult to speak

### Thoughts

- Difficulty remembering things
- Finds it hard to concentrate or make decisions
- Blames themselves a lot and feels guilty about things
- No self-confidence or self-esteem
- Having a lot of negative thoughts
- The future seems bleak
- Has been thinking about suicide

### Physical symptoms

- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Feeling tired with no energy
- Eating more or less than usual
- Physical aches and pains with no obvious physical cause

# Depression

## What causes it?

There are many different things that can trigger depression such as traumatic events or bereavement. Sometimes there is a physical cause such as hormonal imbalance or a physical condition which affects the brain or nervous system. Some people are more predisposed to depression,

if there is a history of it in the family – for these people it's especially important to focus on positive wellbeing and developing healthy coping mechanisms. Sometimes there is no trigger at all and depression can come seemingly from nowhere and for no definable reason.

---

## How might depression impact on daily life?

People who are depressed may become increasingly isolated and spend more time at home. They may stop participating in activities they once enjoyed and find it generally hard to motivate themselves to do things. Getting up and washed and

dressed can feel almost impossible. Depression can result in people feeling constantly hungry or losing their appetite completely. Likewise, some people find that they can barely sleep at all, whilst others are constantly tired and sleep far more than before.

---

## How can depression be treated?

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines on the treatment of depression recommend:

- **active monitoring** – this is for mild depression and means keeping an eye on you while waiting to see if your depression goes away without treatment, which mild depression often does
- **cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)** – this helps sufferers to identify and change negative thoughts and feelings affecting their behaviour. CBT can be accessed in different ways including self-help books, computerised CBT for mild depression or a series of sessions with a therapist for more severe depression
- **mindfulness-based cognitive therapy** – an approach to wellbeing that involves accepting life, and living and paying attention to the present moment. This is usually done in small groups.

# Depression

**behavioural activation** – makes you look at the simple everyday tasks you may be avoiding and start doing them. Activity helps you to feel better, and once you have conquered some everyday tasks, you may feel ready to tackle some bigger ones.

**other forms of counselling or therapy.**

**medication** – antidepressant drugs work on brain chemicals to lift your mood. It often takes between two to six weeks before the drugs take effect. They don't cure depression, but they can make you feel better so that you may feel able to take action to deal with the problems causing your depression. Medication may be recommended in combination with therapy for severe depression, but not for mild to moderate depression unless other treatments have not helped. This should be combined with therapy.

**Exercise** – regular exercise can be very effective lifting mood and regulating appetite and sleep. Physical activity also stimulates chemicals in the brain called endorphins, which can help sufferers to feel better.

## Where can I find out more?

### **Depression Alliance**

*web: [depressionalliance.org](http://depressionalliance.org)*

Information, support and self-help groups.

### **Depression UK**

*web: [depressionuk.org](http://depressionuk.org)*

A self-help organisation made up of individuals and local groups.

### **Students against depression**

*web: [studentsagainstdepression.org](http://studentsagainstdepression.org)*

Information and resources for young people with depression.

# Eating Disorders

## What are eating disorders?

People with eating disorders use food or exercise as a way of managing difficult thoughts, feelings or experiences.

## *What are the symptoms of eating disorders?*

Eating disorders can take many forms – and many people move between the different types of behaviours during the course of their illness. There are three main types of eating disorder:

**Binge Eating Disorder** – large amounts of food are eaten in a short period of time. Binge eating disorder results in weight gain and whilst sufferers may try hard to control their diet and lifestyle outside of their binges, they often report feeling completely out of control when they are bingeing. The weight gain associated with binge eating disorder can lead to physical complications such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

**Bulimia Nervosa** – describes a cycle of consuming large quantities of food and then taking measures to remove that food from the body or to burn it off through exercise or restriction of further food intake. Many people with Bulimia do not change in weight, though in other cases weight can be seen to fluctuate. Some purging behaviours are very dangerous and can result in fits or fainting or liver or kidney damage.

**Anorexia Nervosa** – food intake is severely restricted and / or a large amount of exercise is taken. Weight loss is a key symptom and many sufferers are very underweight.

Eating disorders are often seen alongside other difficulties such as self-harm, depression and anxiety. Regardless of the type of eating disorder, sufferers tend to suffer from very low self-esteem, negative self-image and feelings of intense distress.

The weight loss associated with anorexia can result in physical health complications such as low blood pressure, fits, fainting, problems with the internal organs and brittle bones.

# Eating Disorders

## What causes them?

There are a wide range of reasons why someone might develop an eating disorder. They can affect anyone and sufferers are often very good at keeping their symptoms hidden. Some people may be more likely to develop an eating disorder than other people, if there is a family history for example or if they have suffered abuse or trauma, but for some people there might be no clear cause at all or the underlying reasons may be complex and confusing.

## How might eating disorders impact on daily life?

Having an eating disorder can make many normal situations difficult as sufferers may not feel comfortable eating or drinking in front of other people, so there may be situations they avoid, or there may be secretive behaviours associated with bingeing or purging. Many people with eating disorders also struggle with associated anxiety or depression (see anxiety and depression above).

## How can eating disorders be treated?

Treatment types for eating disorders vary according to the type and the severity of the condition. Talking therapies are a common and effective treatment. Two effective types are cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) which helps sufferers to identify and change negative thoughts and feelings affecting their behaviour and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) which can help sufferers to feel more aware of their emotions and accepting of themselves.

Medication is sometimes prescribed, especially for people with binge eating disorder or bulimia. This is often with the aim of treating underlying depression or anxiety.

If the issues have been going on for a long time, the symptoms are very severe or there is a dangerous impact on physical health then admission to an inpatient clinic might be advised. Sometimes this will be a children's unit, sometimes a general psychiatric unit and sometimes an eating disorders specialist unit.

## Where can I find out more?

### Beat

helpline: 0845 634 7650

web: [b-eat.co.uk](http://b-eat.co.uk)

Offers information on eating disorders and runs a supportive online community. Beat also provides a directory of support services at [helpfinder.b-eat.co.uk](http://helpfinder.b-eat.co.uk)



# Self-harm

## What is self-harm?

Self-harm describes any way in which someone might hurt themselves or put themselves at risk in response to, or in order to manage overwhelming thoughts, feelings or experiences. Self-harm is not a mental illness and for many people it is a way of coping with the stresses of daily life, for others it is a way of managing the thoughts and feelings caused by or underlying other conditions such as depression and anxiety.

## What causes it?

People self-harm for a variety of different reasons; for some people this is a temporary means of coping with a temporary situation whilst for others it becomes a longer term coping mechanism. What people who self-harm tend to have in common is that they are trying to cope with overwhelming thoughts and feelings and have not yet learnt a healthier way of coping which works consistently and effectively.

## How might self-harm impact on daily life?

Self-harm can be a very isolating and secretive activity which some people feel ashamed of or embarrassed about, or they may be worried that they'll be teased, bullied or accused of attention

seeking. This can cause people who self-harm to become increasingly isolated. People with self-harm injuries or scars will often try to keep them hidden, wearing long sleeves even in warm weather and avoiding situations where other people might see their injuries such as PE, sleepovers or shopping trips.

## How can self-harm be treated?

The most common treatments for self-harm are talking therapies or support groups. In recovery, people who self-harm will often focus a lot on learning when and why they self-harm and finding ways to avoid the urge to self-harm, distract from the need to self-harm or learn to manage and respond to difficult feelings in healthier ways.

Two types of talking therapy that are found to help people who self-harm are cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) which helps sufferers to identify and change negative thoughts and feelings affecting their behaviour and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) which can help sufferers to feel more aware of their emotions and accepting of themselves.

If there is underlying depression, anxiety or another mental illness, it's important to seek treatment for this also.

## Self-harm

### Where can I find out more?

#### **Harmless**

*web: [harmless.org.uk](http://harmless.org.uk)*

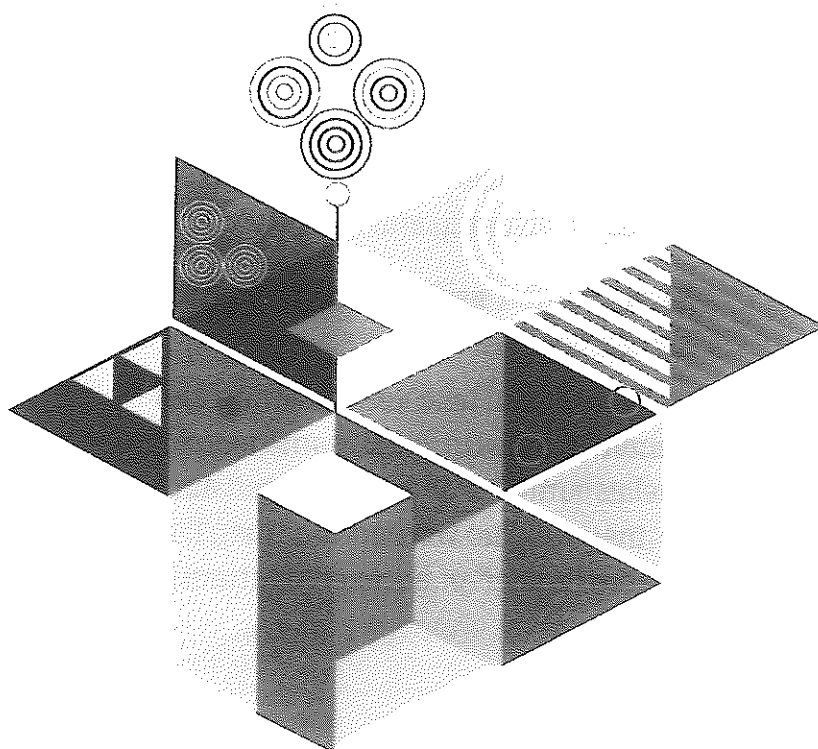
User-led organisation for people who self-harm, friends and families.

#### **National Self Harm Network (NSHN)**

*helpline: 0800 622 6000*

*web: [nshn.co.uk](http://nshn.co.uk)*

Survivor-led organisation for people who self-harm, friends and families.



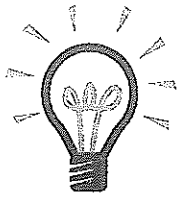


# HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

---

There are lots of different ways that we can cope with difficult thoughts, feeling and situations. Here we've listed a wide range of ideas suggested by young people. Everyone is different, so what works for one person might not work for another. You'll probably have further ideas you could add to these lists.

Some of these ideas will feel like a perfect fit, whilst others will seem ridiculous to you, it's just about seeing what works for *YOU*, we're all different. These ideas have all been suggested by people who've self-harmed in the past, so they worked for someone!



## Venting BIG feelings

Sometimes our feelings become too much for us to bear. These ideas are all ones designed to help vent anger, frustration or other extreme feelings.

---

- Go somewhere quiet and scream
  - Punch a punch bag
  - Make a ball out of play dough and smash it
  - Hurl lumps of ice at the ground and watch them smash
  - Smash a watermelon
  - Hammer nails into wood
  - Play squash
  - Tear up a magazine
  - Write down what made you feel angry and scribble it out until the paper is worn through
  - Dance like nobody is watching
  - Play music loudly
  - Bang drums or other percussion instruments
  - Run up hill
  - Write a letter to the person who has made you angry, venting your frustration (but don't send it)
  - Cry
  - Cut up an old piece of material
  - Tear up cardboard
  - Have a pillow fight with a wall
  - Stamp your feet
  - Snap sticks in half
  - Sing very loudly
-



## When feeling down or alone

These are ideas which might help someone when their mood is low – if they feel alone or deeply sad.

---

Look at photographs of friends and family

Think of the best day ever

Tell someone about the best day ever

Talk to someone trustworthy

Call a helpline or use an online forum

Listen to soothing music

Take a walk in the garden, notice each tree and flower and try to learn their names

Walk a dog

Go to the park and swing, listen to the laughter of children playing

Re-read a favourite childhood book

Watch silly videos of cats on YouTube

Listen to a 'feel good' playlist of songs

---



## Ideas to give a feeling of control

Sometimes the world can feel out of control. Here are some non-harmful ways of gaining control and order for a few minutes.

---

Put your books in height, alphabetical or colour order

Plan your diary for the next week, build in rest or fun breaks

Build something intricate like an Airfix or Lego model

Paint by numbers

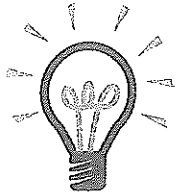
Read a kids' '*choose your own adventure*' book making all the '*wrong*' choices

Make bread from scratch

Give your bedroom a facelift by shifting the furniture around

Give your room a deep clean

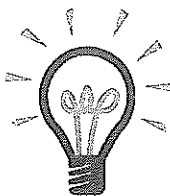
---



## Ideas for distraction

These are ideas designed to remove the focus from difficult thoughts and feeling to something more manageable.

- 
- Watch something light-hearted on TV
  - Go for a walk
  - Call a friend for a chat
  - Have a shower
  - Do a jigsaw
  - Find something beginning with every letter of the alphabet
  - Write a letter or an email
  - Read a book
  - Sleep
  - Learn the words to a new song
  - Practice a musical instrument
  - Curl up on a bean bag and watch the world go by
  - Play a computer game
  - Practise a new skill (e.g. speaking a language, juggling)
  - Bake
  - Sew or knit
  - Build a card house or line of cards then knock it down
  - Look for pictures in the clouds
  - Do some cleaning
  - Work in the garden, dead-head some flowers or do some weeding
  - Fly a kite
  - Watch out for birds and try to identify the different types
  - Skim stones – how many bounces can you do?
  - Write a blog post or journal entry
- 



## Ideas working through confusing thoughts and feelings

These ideas can help people to start thinking a little more straight and begin to understand ourselves and what is going on around us.

- 
- Write a poem called *'I don't understand'*
  - Paint a big, abstract, picture using poster paints
  - Write down all the questions in your head
  - Stop and work backwards through the last hour trying to answer the question 'what made me feel this way?'
  - Express confused feelings through music
-



## Ideas that won't be noticed in busy situations

Here are a few ideas that can help people manage difficult feelings without anyone even noticing.

---

**Scream silently in your head**

**Imagine yourself in your favourite place with your favourite people**

**Become aware of every part of your body in turn, think about your toes, then your ankles then your knees etc**

**Breathe deeply and slowly, counting to five with each inhalation and each exhalation**

**Recite a fact about each other person in the room in your head**

**If you're amongst strangers, pick one and imagine what they did last Friday**

---