

Recovery

The aim of this factsheet is to provide a basic introduction to the concept of recovery from mental illness by exploring what appear to be key areas in the lives of many people working towards recovery. Rethink Mental Illness has conducted its own research into recovery and this factsheet draws heavily from our findings as well as other literature and the experience of our own service users and carers.

It is aimed as an overview if you are thinking about your recovery, perhaps for the first time, with suggestions for further reading and other resources. At the end of most sections are suggestions for Rethink Mental Illness factsheets which may provide more in-depth information in that area.

 KEY POINTS

- The concept that people can and do recover from severe mental illness has become more accepted in recent years.
- "Personal recovery" is different to "clinical recovery". Clinical recovery tends to mean "getting back to normal" and being symptom free. This factsheet is about personal recovery.
- Personal recovery means different things to different people and should be defined by the person experiencing mental illness. However, for many people it means a way of living a satisfying and meaningful life within the limits of mental illness.
- There are different themes and elements which tend to be important for many people working towards recovery.
- These themes include hope, acceptance, control, basic needs and meaningful activity.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What is recovery?](#)
2. [What has been found to be important in recovery?](#)
3. [Hope](#)
4. [Acceptance and identity](#)
5. [Control and responsibility](#)
6. [Basic and Material needs](#)
7. [Relationships](#)
8. [Treatments](#)
9. [Support](#)
10. [Self management](#)
11. [Having a purpose and meaningful activity](#)
12. [Spirituality](#)
13. [Recovery and Mental Health Services](#)
14. [Recovery and Personalisation](#)

1. What is recovery?

The idea of recovery from mental illness has grown in recent years and challenges the view that severe mental illness is long-lasting, gets worse and prevents people from engaging in society¹. Instead the view that people can and do recover has emerged from personal accounts and is supported by the development of better treatments.

A Rethink Mental Illness report suggested that there are two main meanings of recovery today²:

- Clinical recovery is an idea that has emerged from the expertise of mental health professionals, and involves getting rid of symptoms, restoring social functioning and 'getting back to normal' i.e. how you were before the illness.
- Personal recovery is an idea that has emerged from the expertise of people with lived experience of mental illness, and means something different to clinical recovery.

This factsheet is about personal recovery. The most widely used definition of personal recovery is:

"a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even within the limitations caused by illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness"³

[Top](#)

2. What has been found to be important in recovery?

Rethink Mental Illness believes that personal recovery is based on two main principles⁴:

- Firstly, personal recovery is something worked towards and experienced by the person with mental illness. It is not something health professionals or carers can do to or for you. The contribution of other people is to support you in your journey towards recovery.
- Secondly, the journey of recovery is individual. The best way that others can support your recovery will vary.

Recovery from mental illness is therefore a very personal journey which needs to be defined and determined by you. However, there are some common themes which re-occur when people talk about the areas of most importance in their recovery journey⁵. The following sections include some of those areas to help you think about what might be important in your own recovery journey.

It is also important to remember that a person's recovery journey may not be a straight forward process. Many people have to try different things before finding out what works for them and it is possible to experience set backs on the way. This is a normal part of the recovery journey and each set back can bring new insights for the recovery journey as a whole. Equally important is to remember to celebrate when you feel you have experienced or achieved some success on your recovery journey.

[Top](#)

3. Hope

Research has shown that having hope is key for many people's recovery journey. The belief that it is possible to regain a meaningful life, despite serious mental illness needs to be nurtured to help recovery occur⁶.

One of the key ways that hope can be fostered is by seeing visible role models of recovery. This can be accessed through self help groups or online. Friends, family and carers and professionals helping to create an environment of hope can also be key to developing your own hope.⁷

[Top](#)

4. Acceptance and identity

Research conducted by Rethink Mental Illness has found that acceptance has a powerful role to play in recovery⁸. Learning to accept yourself, your illness and the difficulties you may face can be a key point in recovery.

Acceptance can lead to changes in lifestyle, attitudes and expectations, which can be useful for many people in their recovery journey. It can also be vital to be accepted by others such as family and friends. Having a sense of belonging from joining a mutual support or self help group can also be important.

For many people the onset of severe mental illness can challenge their ideas of who they were previously. Returning to former roles may not be possible. For some people regaining their previous role may be important.

For others rebuilding a new identity which is at one with the person they have become after the illness helps.⁹

[Top](#)

5. Control and taking responsibility

For many people with severe mental illness, regaining control over their lives is a key aspect of recovery. This can filter into many other parts of your recovery journey.

This can mean having choice over your medication, treatment and support. It can also mean developing self management techniques to have personal control over your symptoms¹⁰. (See Section 10 for further information on self management).

Taking responsibility for your own recovery is also linked to taking control.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service factsheets and resources:

- **Antidepressants**
- **Antipsychotics**
- **Benzodiazepines**
- **Mood Stabilisers**
- **Coping With Hearing Voices**
- **Talking Treatments.**

These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

[Top](#)

6. Basic and material needs

Having secure finances and a suitable place to live can be a key milestone for your recovery. For some this may be accessing appropriate supported housing whereas for others it may be living independently¹¹. Secure accommodation can provide a basic sense of feeling comfortable and secure, but also a feeling of control over your life.

Receiving the right benefits or accessing paid employment can meet another basic need as it can enable you to have more control in engaging in society.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service factsheets:

- **Housing Options**
- **Supported Housing**
- **Employment and Support Allowance**
- **Disability Living Allowance**
- **Welfare benefits and mental illness**
- **How to deal with debt.**

These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

[Top](#)

7. Relationships

Rethink Mental Illness research shows that having relationships where people felt supported and encouraged is vital for recovery¹². These relationships can be with family, friends, other people with mental illness or professionals.

Having relationships can help you to feel less isolated and provide a sense of belonging. At the same time recognising when relationships can have a negative impact on you and learning how to manage those can be equally important.

[Top](#)

8. Treatment

For many people getting the right treatment is hugely important and often their first step towards recovery¹³. This may or may not mean taking medication. It could be about taking the medication that works best for you and has the least negative impact in terms of side effects.

It may also be about accessing other kinds of treatment such as talking therapy or art therapy. Sometimes it can be difficult to get treatment other than medication from local health services but they can be of great benefit and therefore worth pursuing if you are interested. For more information about how to access therapy see our factsheets below.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service Factsheets and resources:

- **Antidepressants**
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[Top](#)

9. Support

Receiving support is also widely considered to be an important part of recovery.¹⁴ Valuable support can come from family, friends, partners, health professionals and support groups.

Rethink Mental Illness research showed that getting the right kind of support from health professionals can make a big difference to recovery¹⁵. For example mental health professionals who treat service users as individuals and recognise that they are experts in their own recovery journey meant a genuine supportive relationship could be fostered which

helped recovery. If you or the person you care about feel you are not getting enough, or the right kind of, support from mental health services you may want to read our factsheets below.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service Factsheets:

- **The Care Programme Approach (CPA)**
- **What am I entitled to if I am not on CPA**
- **Personalisation**
- **Direct Payments**
- **Community Care.**

These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

[Top](#)

10. Self management

An important part for many in the recovery journey is learning how to organise their life in a way which maximises good health and avoids triggers¹⁶. Successful self management will differ from person to person, as well as between mental illnesses so it is important to remember that one size does not fit all. It may also take a while to understand the self management techniques that work for you so it is important not to be discouraged from early mistakes. Many people find that learning as much as possible about their illness can be a great help. Rethink Advice & Information Service has factsheets on different conditions and which include suggested resources, which may be a good start.

It also may help to work closely with a loved one or mental health professional who can help you reflect on what has triggered previous episodes and what helps you stay well.

Having access to therapy which helps deal with symptoms can also help self management. For example, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for psychosis is being used more widely as a way to help people with psychotic illnesses manage their symptoms. It is also used widely for conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service Factsheets:

- **Talking Treatments**
- **Complementary Therapies**
- **Coping with Hearing Voices.**

These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

We also have a '**Good health guide**', which looks at physical health, available from www.rethink.org.

[Top](#)

11. Having a purpose/meaningful activity.

Having a purpose and finding meaning is something that has been shown to be important to many during their recovery¹⁷. This is likely to mean different things to different people but may involve some kind of activity such as being involved in a project, volunteering, or going back to employment.

You may need to reassess your goals in life or find new ways to work towards them. You may find that you are not able to pursue the goals and activities you were before your illness. You may find that you do not want to follow those previous goals.

People find many benefits to engaging in some form of meaningful regular activity. For example, it can provide a structure to the day and give you "something to get up for". It can also have a positive impact on your self esteem. This comes from the sense of self worth and value that can come from making a contribution and working with others. It can also provide access to social networks (being around other people) which is also crucial to recovery.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service factsheets:

- **Work and Mental Illness**
- **Studying and Mental Illness.**

These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

[Top](#)

12. Spirituality

For some people exploring and maintaining a spiritual dimension to their life can be an important aspect of their recovery¹⁸. Spirituality can help provide a sense of inner peace and have a direct effect on your well being.

Meditation, mindfulness and yoga are examples of spiritual techniques which many people with mental illness find useful to help manage symptoms. Other people find joining a spiritual community worthwhile due to the support that can be available from such communities.

Some people's experience of mental illness involved a spiritual dimension so it can be useful to talk about these experiences and for them to be acknowledged rather than merely treated as symptoms of mental illness.

Useful Rethink Advice & Information Service factsheets:

- **Spirituality and Mental Illness**
- **Complementary Therapy.**

These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

[Top](#)

13.Recovery and Mental Health Services

Most mental health services are increasingly trying to be more focused on supporting recovery and Government policies encourage local teams to develop recovery focused services. For example, the recent government guidance 'No health without mental health' set a key objective that more people will recover.¹⁹ They describe this as:

“More people who develop mental health problems will have a good quality of life – greater ability to manage their own lives, stronger social relationships, a greater sense of purpose, the skills they need for living and working, improved chances in education, better employment rates and a suitable and stable place to live.”

If you are on the Care Programme Approach, your care plan should be developed by looking at your needs in areas such as vocational activities (related to work or training), education and social inclusion. This reflects the view that people with mental illness can live a meaningful life with the right support.

If you feel that your care plan does not follow a recovery approach you could discuss this with your Care Coordinator and/or put in a formal complaint. You could also discuss this with the Rethink Advice & Information Service. Our contact details are at the end of this factsheet.

See our factsheets '**The Care Programme Approach (CPA)**' and '**Complaining about the NHS or Social Services**' for more information. These are available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

[Top](#)

14.Recovery and Personalisation

Personalisation is a way of giving people who receive social care services more control in how these services are received and more freedom in choosing the services they need. One method is for people to receive a “personal budget” which is money paid into a person’s bank account to spend on what they feel will meet their needs.

For example, instead of a person going to a day centre, they may be able to use their personal budget to go on a course to re-train in new skills. The previous non-personalised approach to social care meant that there was little choice outside of the existing services that a Local Authority offered. This could have created a barrier to recovery if these services were not what a person felt they needed to access in order help their recovery.

All local authorities should now be adopting a personalisation approach, which means that accessing services appropriate to individual recovery is more likely. Rethink Mental Illness are aware that people with mental health problems are not being offered personal budgets as much as they should be. If you are under the Care Programme Approach you should already have had your social care needs assessed and you are entitled to

receive a personal budget to meet any needs identified. If you are not under CPA you should still be able to access a personal budget if you have high enough social care needs.

For more information on personal budgets see our factsheet '**Personalisation in Community Care**'. This is available to download for free from www.rethink.org/factsheets or call 0300 5000 927 and request that a copy is sent to you.

If you are having problems accessing a personal budget, you could contact the Rethink Advice & Information Service for advice. Our contact details are at the end of this factsheet.

[Top](#)



Rethink Mental Illness resources:

Recovery insights - Learning from lived experiences

Based on lived experiences of 55 people, this booklet provides learning points on how to assist recovery. While recovery is an individual journey, many people, in many different ways, are involved in making it happen. The booklet offers practical guidance specifically for people experiencing mental health problems, family and friends, and mental health professionals.

Available to download for free from www.rethink.org/resources.

Getting Back Into the World

This focuses on the opportunities that can be provided as well as obstacles that can be reduced to assist each person's own 'recovery journey'. The descriptions are based on findings from a research study where seven people with personal experience of mental illness and treatment interviewed 48 people with similar experiences across England, and used personal insights in the analysis and write-up of findings.

Available to download for free from www.rethink.org/resources. Hard copies were not available to order at the time of writing.

100 Ways To Support Recovery

A report which identifies 100 ways in which people working across the mental health sector can support the recovery of people with mental health problems.

Available to download for free from www.rethink.org/resources.

Other recommended titles

A Gift of Stories: Discovering how to deal with mental illness (Julie Leibrich. Otago University Press: 1999)

Recovery beyond psychiatry (David Whitwell. Free Association Books; 2005).

Stop Paddling/Start Sailing: A journey and some ideas (Roger Smith. PublishAmerica; 2004)

Useful websites about recovery

Recovery Devon

An independent community of people who support recovery and wellbeing, both as a personal vision and as an underpinning value base to promote radical change in mental health attitudes and provision.

www.recoverydevon.co.uk

A website about the work of Mary Anne Copeland whose important contribution to the studies of recovery have produced a range of resources.

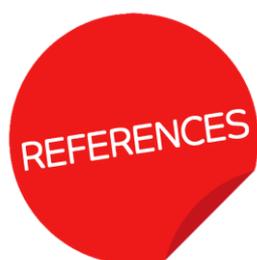
<http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com>

Scottish Recovery Network

The Scottish Recovery Network exists to raise awareness of recovery through a loose affiliation of individuals and organisations to share information and ideas.

www.scottishrecovery.net

[Top](#)



¹ Andresen. R., L. Oades, P. Caputi. The experience of recovery from schizophrenia: towards an empirically validated stage model. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 2003;37:586-594.

² Slade, M. *100 ways to support recovery: a guide for mental health professionals*. London: Rethink. 2009 www.rethink.org/

³. Anthony WA. Recovery from mental illness: the guiding vision of the mental health service system in the 1990s, *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 1993;16, 4, 11-23.

⁴ See reference 2

⁵ Rethink Mental Illness recovery series: volume 3; *Recovery Insights: Learning from lived experience*. 2009 www.rethink.org/resources

⁶ See reference 2 (page 15)

⁷ See reference 2 (page 15)

⁸ See reference 5 (page 9)

⁹ See reference 5 (page 9)

¹⁰ See reference 5 (page 12)

¹¹ Rethink Mental Illness. *Recovery Serious: Volume 2 Getting Back Into the World*. 2008. Page 15
http://www.rethink.org/mental_health_shop/products/rethink_publications/getting_back_into_th.html

¹² See reference 5 (page 6)

¹³ See reference 5 (page 6)

¹⁴ See reference 11 (page 20)

¹⁵ See reference 11 (page 20)

¹⁶ See reference 11 (page 31)

¹⁷ See reference 11 (page 36)

¹⁸ See reference 11 (page 36)

¹⁹ Department of Health, *No health without mental health*. London: Department of Health. 2011. Page 6.

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Rethink Advice & Information Service

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The Rethink Advice & Information Service welcomes your feedback on whether this information was helpful to you. You can provide feedback in the following ways:

By email: feedback@rethink.org

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quality of life for everyone
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