

Are you worried about your mental health?

This factsheet explains what you can do and how you can get help if you are worried about your mental health.



KEY POINTS

- Some people may experience changes in how they are feeling or thinking, which can begin to cause problems in their day-to-day life. If you are experiencing this, it may be a sign that you are experiencing mental health problems.
- Experiencing mental health problems is very common. 1 in 4 people will have a mental illness at some point in their lives.
- Mental health problems rarely happen overnight and usually appear gradually. They often start with gradual changes in your thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
- If you think you may be experiencing a mental health problem, it is a good idea to seek treatment as soon as possible. Seeking help earlier on can improve the chances of recovery.
- If you wish to seek treatment, you could go and see your GP first of all.

This factsheet covers:

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1. How common are mental health problems?

Mental health issues are more common than you may realise. Up to 1 in 4 people will experience mental health problems at some point in their lives.¹ For a lot of people these mental health problems will be mild to moderate mood problems. They could be caused by traumatic events such as losing a job or a close relative dying or stressful situations such as money issues. These feelings can often feel intense, especially over a short period of time, but are often temporary. With the right support and help people will be able to make good, positive steps towards recovery.

Some people will experience more serious problems with their mental health. These types of mental health issues often occur as gradual changes that a person may not notice or realise. People might start to behave strangely, or start having thoughts or beliefs they didn't have before.

Go to www.rethink.org for specific information about:

- **Anxiety Disorders**
- **Depression**
- **Bipolar Disorder**
- **Personality Disorders**
- **Psychosis**
- **Schizoaffective Disorder**
- **Schizophrenia**

Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

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2. What are the signs that things may not be right?

Many people experience symptoms associated with mental health problems at some point in their lives. One symptom alone does not make a mental illness. However, if you have several symptoms at the same time, then this could mean you have a mental illness, especially if you have had them for some time.

If your day-to-day life is getting worse because of these symptoms, then this could also be a sign that something is not right.

Signs of mental health problems could be:

- Being anxious and irritable
- Being depressed (having a low mood for a long time)
- Finding it difficult to concentrate or remember things
- Sleeping less or too much
- Feeling changes in your mood
- Finding it difficult to manage everyday life (for example, preparing food, washing regularly)

- Becoming suspicious and paranoid
- Changing how you behave around people (for example, becoming isolated and withdrawn)
- Having suicidal thoughts
- Believing that your family and/or friends want to do you harm
- Believing that people or organisations are out to get you
- Experiencing hallucinations (sensing things that other people do not – this can include seeing and hearing things)
- Believing that you have special powers or are on a mission.
- Excessive spending and/or problems managing your money

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3. Where can I get help?

Going to see your GP

If you are worried about your mental health try and seek help early. The best option for seeking help is to visit your GP and discuss how you are feeling.

It can be hard to discuss what are very personal problems. However GPs are generally experienced in dealing with mental health so try to be open about how you have been feeling and relax.

Community care assessment to help with everyday life

Your mental health problems may mean you have social care needs. These can include needing help with:

- Getting out of the house
- Preparing meals or going shopping
- Managing your money
- Having social contact with friends and family.

You can contact your local Social Services department and ask for a community care assessment. This sort of assessment does not look at health needs like medication or talking therapy. If the person assessing you thinks you may also have health needs, they should let health services know and ask them if they would like to assess you.²

Under the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, your local Social Services has to carry out a community care assessment if they know that someone may need social support.

You will probably need social support if you:

- Are not eating and need help to prepare meals
- Find it hard to wash and keep clean.
- Can't remember to take medication
- Aren't dealing very well with money
- Are finding it hard to stay safe.

You can find more information about **‘What to Expect From Your GP’** and **‘Community Care’** at www.rethink.org. Or contact 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

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4. What will happen when I see a GP?

If you go to see your GP, they should carry out an initial check. You may have mild symptoms of depression that the doctor believes may clear up on their own or you may not want any treatment at the moment. In these situations the GP may ask you to keep an eye on your feelings, thoughts and behaviour over a couple of weeks and ask you to come back for another check.³

If this happens the doctor should still give you advice on eating properly, sleeping better, exercise and information about any illness the doctor believes you may have.⁴

If you need treatment for a mental health problem, your GP will probably help you rather than sending you to a specialist

The GP should check your health fully. He or she might fill in questionnaires and other forms. These questionnaires can help to work out the type of treatment you may need.

The GP will often ask if you would like medication and talking therapies.

Talking therapy for problems such as depression and anxiety is likely to be through the Improved Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT). This is an NHS programme to provide proven talking therapies for patients.⁵ You may be able to contact your local IAPT service directly if you can't get a referral from your GP.

If you are showing signs of more severe mental health problems then your GP may refer you to specialist mental health services for assessment (for example, to see a psychiatrist). If you are diagnosed with a more severe mental health problem, a psychiatrist may manage your care and will be able to prescribe medication, refer you for talking therapies and could put you in touch with specialist teams for extra help and support (for example, the Community Mental Health Team). If you receive this extra help and support, this could be through the Care Programme Approach (CPA).

See [section 2](#) for a list of possible symptoms of mental health issues.

You can find more about:

- **Talking Therapies**
- **Antidepressants**
- **Antipsychotics**
- **Mood Stabilisers**
- **Benzodiazepines**

- **Community mental health team**
- **Care Programme Approach (CPA)**

At www.rethink.org. Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

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5. Mental health myths

There are lots of stereotypes and misunderstandings about mental health problems and these can often deter people from seeking help and treatment. A few examples of these are included below.

Myth: People with mental health problems are different from normal people.

Fact: We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health. Both of these can go up and down naturally from day to day.

People can often feel anxious or depressed without it meaning they have a mental health problem, just as people can feel tired or under the weather without them being signs of a long term illness.⁶

Myth: People with mental health problems never recover.

Fact: Many people who have experienced mental health problems say that they have recovered with the right treatment and with the help and support of others. Many are able to lead happy and positive lives.⁷

Myth: After experiencing a mental health problem, people are weaker.

Fact: Many people who have gone through this and received the appropriate treatment actually feel stronger.⁸

Myth: You only get a mental health problem if someone else in your family has one.

Fact: Most people with a mental illness do not have family members with the illness.⁹ You may have a higher chance of developing certain mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder if members of your family have it. However, even then, it is only one of several possible reasons that you could get a mental health problem.¹⁰

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6. Will my information be kept confidential?

GPs have strict guidelines on confidentiality and information sharing which means they are not allowed to give information about you to third parties without your direct consent.

This means they will not give information to your partner, children or parents as well as your employer or other organisations. If information was

shared without your permission, you could potentially take legal action against the GP or doctor.

Guidelines (General Medical Council's Confidentiality Guidelines, 2009) state that your close relatives can provide information to GPs about you (for example, inform them about your mental health) and the GP could then use this information to inform your treatment and diagnosis.¹¹ Professionals helping you can also share information about your mental health. Your Community Mental Health Team and your GP could also discuss your health.

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7. Do mental health problems affect me working?

If you are a doctor, nurse, teacher or social worker, you may have to go through fitness to practice tests. If you are studying one of these professions you may need to as well. This is looked at when working in these professions and also when applying for courses to study in these areas.

If you tell your employer, college or university that you have a mental health problem, then your employer or study provider may ask your permission to contact your doctor. They would do this to get more information about your mental health and check that you are fit to practise. They would usually ask for a letter or report from your doctor. Your doctor would only share this information with your permission because of their duty of confidentiality to you. Having a mental health condition does not mean that you are automatically considered unfit to practise. Telling your employer that you have a mental health problem could protect you from illegal discrimination or lead to you getting extra support if you have a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

You can find more information about '**Discrimination and mental health**' and '**Confidentiality**' at www.rethink.org. Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

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8. What if I have problems getting help?

Although all doctors should be trained to deal with mental health, when you go and see your GP they may not always be very understanding or able to see that you have a problem.

If this happens you should not give up and still try to seek help. You could make an appointment to see a different doctor at the surgery where you are registered who may be more understanding. Or you could speak to your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), which is an organisation within the NHS that provides information and support to patients.

You can find your local service using the following link.

[http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient%20advice%20and%20liaison%20services%20\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient%20advice%20and%20liaison%20services%20(PALS)/LocationSearch/363)

If you can't get help through the GP and feel that your mental health problems are severe, you could try contacting the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) yourself and asking for an assessment. Although many CMHTs will only accept referrals from GPs or social services directly, some accept self referrals.

If you can't get any help or assessment, then you might find an advocate useful. An advocate can help you to understand the mental health system and help you to be fully involved in decisions about your care. An advocate is independent from mental health services and can help to make your voice heard with problems you may come across. They may be able to help with writing letters for you or attending appointments or meetings.

There may be a local advocacy service in your area who you can contact for support. You can search for a local organisation online. Or call us on 0300 5000 927 and we can search for a local service.

If you continue to have problems getting an assessment or treatment, you could also consider making a formal complaint.

You can find more information about '**Advocacy**' and '**Complaining about the NHS or Social Services**' at www.rethink.org. Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

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9. Can I get help without going to see my doctor?

You do not have to go and see your GP if you don't want to. You can use self help and get treatment without going to see a GP. If you think you are experiencing anxiety and depression you could try:

- **Paying for private therapy or counselling yourself**

Many therapists operate a sliding scale of charging for treatment for people on lower incomes. It is a good idea to check if a private therapist is registered with an organisation that regulates therapists. This means they have had to meet certain standards.

- **Getting a private psychiatrist to prescribe medication**

Private psychiatrists can be expensive. If you would like to find a private psychiatrist, your GP might know of a psychiatrist privately. Or you could look in a phone directory or online, or through private healthcare providers such as the Priory or Cygnet. You should check that any private psychiatrist is registered with the General Medical Council (you can check here: www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/LRMP.asp#View).

- **Online self help**

Self-help tools on the internet include:

www.beatingtheblues.co.uk – for depression

www.fearfighter.com – for anxiety

Both are computer based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) packages that are available on the internet. They are available free through the NHS, but can also be purchased privately at a cost of around £400.

You could also try:

Get Self Help www.getselfhelp.co.uk/

a free website containing CBT self-help resources

Moodjuice www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/

a free online self-help resource for a variety of mental health problems and symptoms

Moodscope www.moodscope.com

a free, social networking tool that allows people to monitor their mood and receive support.

Living life to the full www.lttf.com

a free internet self-help resource for a variety of issues.

- **Support from a local organisation**

You might be able to get help from a charity community organisation. Many charities offer therapy or one-to-one support. You could try finding out what is available in your area.

At Rethink Mental Illness we often provide psychological therapy, peer support groups or community services. Find out what is available at www.rethink.org. Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

MIND – also provides local services, some of which provide therapy, support groups and other help. You can search for what is available locally.

www.mind.org.uk

Tel: 0300 123 3393

Anxiety UK - Can help with low cost therapies if you have anxiety (you have to join the organisation).

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Tel: 08444 775 774

Moodswings - gives practical support and help to people experiencing mood disorders.

www.moodswings.org.uk

Tel: 0845 1236050

If you are experiencing psychotic symptoms then the NHS may be a more effective route as they can offer more specialist NHS services.

If you have psychosis you might:

- See or hear things that other people do not. Doctors call these hallucinations.
- Believe unusual things. You might believe you are being watched or followed
- Have confused and disturbed thoughts

You may not realise that you are experiencing these symptoms. Doctors or professionals often call this 'lack of insight'.

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10. Do drugs and alcohol cause mental health problems?

If you use drugs and/or alcohol regularly, this can cause problems with assessing and treating your mental health. This is because:

- Using alcohol or drugs unwisely can trigger mental illness in some people
- People sometimes use alcohol or drugs to help deal with the symptoms of their conditions. Doctors call this self-medication.
- Alcohol or drugs can:
 - mask mental health problems
 - make medication less effective
 - Sometimes cause other symptoms.¹²

If you have a mental health problem in addition to alcohol and/or drug misuse, doctors call this dual diagnosis. You will probably need specialist help and treatment.

If you use alcohol or drugs unwisely you will be more likely to become unwell again.¹³ If you regularly use drugs or alcohol and believe that you may have a mental health problem discuss this with your doctor as soon as you can.

You can find more information about '**Dual Diagnosis**' at www.rethink.org. Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

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11. What about the future?

Many people have mental health problems and many are able to recover if they get the right sort of support and help. People can often feel much better and more positive about themselves and the future once they have sought treatment.

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

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Mind provides information regarding getting help with mental health problems and accessing services.

Tel: 0300 123 3393 Mon-Fri, 9.15am-5.15pm

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Web: www.mind.org.uk

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

Address: Chris, P.O. Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Web: www.samaritans.org

Sane is a national charity aiming to improve the quality of life for people affected by mental illness.

SANE runs a national, out-of-hours helpline offering specialist emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness

Tel: 0845 767 8000 (6pm to 11pm, everyday)

Email: Via website - www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/email/
www.sane.org.uk

Web: www.sane.org.uk



¹ The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care. *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey in England 2007: Results of a household survey (2009).*

http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/mental%20health/other%20mental%20health%20publications/Adult%20psychiatric%20morbidity%2007/A_PMS%2007%20%28FINAL%29%20Standard.pdf [Accessed 7th February 2013]

² NHS and Community Care Act 1990, s 47 para 3.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/19/section/47> [Accessed 7th February 2013]

³ The National Institute for Clinical Excellence. *Depression: The treatment and management of depression in adults (2009).*

<http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG90/NICEGuidance/pdf/English>

⁴ As above.

⁵ Clark, D. M. (2011). Implementing NICE guidelines for the psychological treatment of depression and anxiety disorders: The IAPT experience. *International Review of Psychiatry* 2011; 23: 375 – 384.

<http://www.iapt.nhs.uk/silo/files/clark-2011-implementing-nice-guidelines-the-iapt-experience.pdf> [Accessed 7th February 2013]

⁶ Time to Change. *Talk About Mental Health (2008).* <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/talk-about-mental-health> [Accessed 7th February 2013]

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- ⁷ Time to Change. *Talk About Mental Health* (2008). <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/talk-about-mental-health> [Accessed 7th February 2013]
- ⁸ Time to Change. *Talk About Mental Health* (2008). <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/talk-about-mental-health> [Accessed 7th February 2013]
- ⁹ Donovan, M. (2012). Genes and Mental Disorders. *Genetic Futures News* <http://www.geneticfutures.com/cracked/info/sheet3.asp> [Accessed 7th February 2013]
- ¹⁰ As above.
- ¹¹ General Medical Council. *Confidentiality* (2009), p 26-27. http://www.gmc-uk.org/static/documents/content/Confidentiality_0910.pdf [Accessed 7th February 2013]
- ¹² *Dual Diagnosis Good Practice Guide*, UK Department of Health, 2002. http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4060435.pdf [Accessed 7th February 2013]
- ¹³ Kazadi, N.J.B, Moosa, M.Y.H & Jeenah, F.Y. Factors Associated with Relapse in Schizophrenia. *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 2008;14: 52-62.

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This factsheet is available
in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

Feedback
PO Box 68795
London SE1 4PN

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0300 5000 927
Email info@rethink.org

www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights. Or talk to others about your problem at www.rethink.org/talk.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0300 5000 927. We are open 9am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us between 10am and 2pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

Can you help us to keep going?

We can only help people because of donations from people like you. If you can donate please go to www.rethink.org/donate or call **0300 5000 927** to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.



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