

Content warning – the following resource covers elements of when physical activity can become unhealthy. We will be touching on topics including eating problems and over-exercise/exercise addiction. If you find any of the content triggering, we encourage you to reach out to Mind’s Infoline on **0300 123 3393** or Samaritans on **116 123** for immediate support if you need it or see [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) for further information.



Signs a relationship with physical activity is becoming unhealthy

We know physical activity can be an amazing way to support our mental health and help us feel good. But it isn’t helpful for everyone all the time, and can lead to problems for some of us.

It’s important to recognise that sometimes our relationship with being physically active can become unhealthy. Look to help people manage this and get the support they need to develop and maintain a healthy relationship.

What are the signs?

Signs can include:

- changes in personality, appearance or how often they exercise
- feeling guilty or anxious when they aren’t doing enough exercise
- exercising in secret
- regular injuries (which can be a sign of over-exercising)
- making excuses to be active
- appearing constantly tired and exhausted
- exercising even when unwell or injured
- exercising instead of connecting with others
- feeling physical activity is the most important thing in their life
- exercising even when they want to stop.

Spotting the signs of over-exercising can be difficult among people who are already very active. Elite Athletes are also at risk of over-exercising (or over-training) if they are training without enough time to rest and recover between training sessions.

What do I do next?

You can make a real difference. By starting conversations with people about the problem, or letting them know where to get help, you can support them towards developing a healthy relationship with exercise.

It may feel difficult, but asking if someone feels OK can be an important first step.

Remember it’s not your responsibility to fix the problem. Listening to what they say and letting them know you hear/understand them can be really helpful.

Introduce the benefits of rest. Talk about how it can help physical and mental health. Show how alternative activities like meditation and massage can become a healthy part of their routine.

Identify a person’s motivation for doing exercise and how it’s making them feel. Physical activity is personal – we all have different preferences, tolerances and fitness levels. Some of us find short sessions suit us best, others enjoy being active for longer. These may differ at different times.

Signposting can help too. You can support people by passing on the details of the organisations and resources below.

Helplines:

- **Signpost people** to their [local Mind](#) or [mental health organisation](#)
- **Suggest an anonymous helpline:**

Call Samaritans on **116 123**

Call Mind’s Infoline on **0300 123 3393**

Text Shout to **85258**

Resources:

[Guide 2 for information on the relationship between physical activity and mental health.](#)

This includes guidance on developing a healthy relationship with physical activity, signs, symptoms and signposting to support.

Mind’s information on [seeking help for a mental health problem.](#)

Mind’s information on [physical activity and mental health.](#)