



# Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Explains what CBT is, what it treats and how to find a therapist. Also includes guidance on how to try CBT by yourself.

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## What is CBT?

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of [talking therapy](#). It is a common treatment for a range of mental health problems.

CBT teaches you coping skills for dealing with different problems. It focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and actions.

"CBT is very, very good for helping me not listen to my self-critical voice, which is so damaging."

## What is the theory behind CBT?

CBT is based on the idea that how we think about situations can affect the way we feel and behave. For example, if you interpret a situation negatively, you might experience negative emotions. And those bad feelings might lead you to behave in a certain way.

CBT combines two types of therapy to help you deal with these thoughts and behaviours:

- **cognitive** therapy, examining the things you **think**
- **behaviour** therapy, examining the things you **do**.

"It got me through a really tough time, from being suicidal and off work on long-term sick leave, to fully functioning again and now in a successful career. It pulled me back from a very dark place and reintroduced structure to my life when I'd given up."

## What does CBT treat?

CBT is a common treatment for many mental health problems and experiences, including:

- [anger problems](#)
- [anxiety and panic attacks](#)
- [bipolar disorder](#)
- [depression](#)
- [drug or alcohol problems](#)
- [eating problems](#)
- [hoarding](#)
- [obsessive-compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#)
- [perinatal mental health problems](#)
- [phobias](#)
- [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#)
- [psychosis](#)
- [schizoaffective disorder](#)
- [schizophrenia](#)



- [self-harm](#)
- [sleep problems](#)
- [stress](#)

Sometimes you might be offered an adaptation of CBT to treat a mental health problem. Some adaptations of CBT for specific problems might have a slightly different name.

For example, you may be offered **trauma-focused CBT (TF-CBT)** to treat [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#).

You may also be offered CBT for physical health problems. This includes if you experience a mental health problem alongside a physical health problem.

#### **Stepped care**

If you are offered NHS treatment for your mental health, they might offer you CBT as a first treatment. They might then offer you [other types of talking therapy or counselling](#) if CBT doesn't work.

This approach is sometimes called stepped care. It might mean you need to try CBT before you can get other treatments.

"CBT is learning to stop the cycle of negative thinking. I still have relapses now and it is the one tool that I use to get me out of the truly dark spots."

## **What are CBT sessions like?**

In CBT, you work with a therapist to identify and challenge negative thought patterns and behaviour.

You and your therapist might focus on what is going on in your life right now. You might also talk about how your past experiences have affected you.

CBT is usually a short-term treatment where you have a set number of sessions. This may vary depending on your local area or therapy service, and the reason you're having CBT.

"It can be daunting when faced with a list of things you can't do, but CBT helped me to break up my goals into manageable chunks."

### **During the sessions**

A typical CBT session may include:



- working through exercises with your therapist to explore your thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- agreeing some activities to work on in your own time
- going over what you did in previous sessions and discussing what progress you've made.

### **Outside the sessions**

CBT can involve activities for you to do outside your sessions with a therapist. This might include filling in worksheets or keeping a diary.

You may need to commit your own time to complete the work over the course of treatment. You may also need to continue this after the treatment has ended.

Our resource on [what happens in therapy](#) has more information about therapy sessions. You can also find out more about how CBT works on the [British Association for Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapies \(BABCP\)](#) website, including information in different languages.

"CBT got me through my chronic health anxiety disorder. It was a tough six months, but I still use the skills I learnt over 10 years ago to rationalise with myself."

### **How can I get CBT?**

You might be able to access CBT through the NHS, charities, your place of work or education, or the private sector.

[Find a therapist](#)

"I still get anxious, but CBT helped me to gain insight and perspective. It was the start of my journey to recovery, though not the only part."

### **Can I do CBT by myself?**

You might be able to do CBT by yourself, including through a computer or workbook. For example, the [NHS apps library](#) lists some mental health apps that may help.

This could be useful to try if you are waiting for treatment. Or it might remind you of some good techniques, if you've had CBT in the past.

Some CBT treatments aren't suitable to try on your own. In particular, the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) recommends that computerised CBT should not be used routinely to treat specific [phobias](#).

You can also talk to your doctor or healthcare team about whether it might help to do some CBT by yourself. They might be able to:



- give you access to an online CBT service like [Beating the Blues](#), which is available for free in some areas
- recommend books, for example from the [Reading Well series of self-help books](#)
- suggest worksheets or other resources that could be helpful for you to try.

"I had previously tried CBT when I was first diagnosed, which I didn't find helpful. However the second time I tried it, it completely changed my life."

### **What if CBT doesn't work for me?**

Although some people find CBT helpful, not everyone does. If you've tried something and it hasn't helped, it's important not to blame yourself. See our information on [what to do if therapy isn't helping](#) and [alternatives to therapy](#) for other options you could try.

"I was encouraged to try CBT again with a different therapist. I like this one and am getting on much better. Which therapist you have makes a big difference!"



## Useful contacts

### Mind's services

- [Mind's helplines](#) provide information and support by phone and email.
- [Local Minds](#) offer face-to-face services across England and Wales. These services include talking therapies, peer support and advocacy.
- [Side by Side](#) is our supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

### Other organisations

#### **British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)**

[babcp.com](http://babcp.com)

Information about cognitive behavioural therapy and related treatments, including details of accredited therapists.

#### **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)**

[nice.org.uk](http://nice.org.uk)

Produces guidelines on best practice in healthcare.

#### **NHS Apps Library**

[nhs.uk/apps-library](http://nhs.uk/apps-library)

A directory of apps that can help you manage and support your physical and mental health.

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© Mind September 2021

To be revised in 2024

References are available on request.