

Studying and mental illness

This factsheet looks at studying with a mental illness. It covers what help is available and things to think about when deciding what and where to study. This information is for people who are 18 or over and affected by mental illness in England. It is also for their loved ones and carers and anyone interested in this subject.

Key Points.

- Studying can be helpful for people living with or recovering from mental illness.
- Studying can help you gain new knowledge and skills for a certain job or career. It can also improve your self-esteem and wellbeing.
- Studying can create extra challenges. These challenges can affect your mental health. But there is support you can get to help you.
- You may be able to get mental health help and financial support while you are studying.
- Your college, university or other course provider may have a student support service. As well as student-led support groups.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What course should I choose?](#)
2. [I am not sure what course I want to do. Who can help me decide?](#)
3. [What support can I get for my mental health?](#)
4. [How much information should I share about my mental health?](#)
5. [What financial support can I get while studying?](#)
6. [What if I have difficulties while studying?](#)

1. What course should I choose?

Choosing which course you want to do will depend on things like:

- what you want to achieve,
- what you are interested in, or
- how you prefer to learn.

You may want to study something completely new or something just for fun. Or you might want to increase your existing skills and experience.

If you want to do a specific job, you should think about the qualifications and skills that you need.

You may find it helpful to find out what your preferred learning style is if you are unsure about this. You can do a short quiz to find this out here: <https://help.open.ac.uk/learning-style-activity>

What is distance learning?

Distance learning involves learning flexibly in your own time.

All teaching, support and materials are usually provided online.

This might be a good way of learning if you need to be flexible. You might have a full-time job, or care for others say.

What are online courses?

Online courses are also known as e-learning. These can be similar to distance learning.

This may be done with a combination of online videos, reading, tasks and resources.

The videos may be recorded or broadcast online on a virtual learning environment (VLE). You might have a tutor, but you do not get one with all online courses.

What are leisure courses?

Leisure courses are short or part-time courses which help you to pick up new skills.

These courses may not necessarily lead to a qualification.

You may want to learn a new subject related to your interests and hobbies. Like, photography, learning how to use a computer or a new language.

These types of courses can help you as part of your mental health recovery. It can be enjoyable to learn a new skill without any pressure to complete a qualification.

They may also allow you to meet new people with similar interests.

These courses may take place in a range of settings. Like online, local community centres, schools or colleges.

You can search online for adult leisure courses here: www.wea.org.uk

What are vocational courses?

Vocational courses focus on learning about a specific job area in a practical way.

They can help you get the skills you need to start a job, move forward in a career, or go on to higher education.

Plumbing, hairdressing, or catering are examples of vocational courses.

Vocational courses are usually provided by further education colleges or training providers. They combine working in real situations and part time study.

What are educational courses?

You may want to study a course to introduce you to an academic subject.

GCSEs, A levels and BTEC qualifications are suitable for this. You can study them for interest or to do a higher education course like a degree.

Further and higher education courses lead to a higher-level qualification at college or university.

If you already have a degree, you may want to consider post-graduate study to improve your knowledge and skills.

Most colleges or universities, or other course providers, will have a copy of what courses they offer on their website. You can also request a paper copy, called a prospectus.

You can search for further and higher education courses here: www.ucas.com

[Top](#)

2. I am not sure what course I want to do. Who can help me decide?

If you are not sure exactly what you want to study, you may find it helpful to speak to a careers adviser.

You might want help with choosing a career or a course to suit your needs. You can get help from the **National Careers Service**. You can find their details in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet.

You might be already studying at university or you have recently graduated. You could speak to your university careers adviser or graduate employment service.

How can I find out what level my qualification is?

In England, qualifications you study should each have a level of academic value. The level of your education can be important when applying for a new course or job.

You can find out more information about types of qualification levels here:

- www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels
- www.careerpilot.org.uk/qualifications

[Top](#)

3. What support can I get for my mental health?

Most universities and colleges have student support services. Other learning providers may do too.

These offer different kinds of support to make student life easier. This could include:

- disability support services,
- counselling, and
- money advice.

Studying can be stressful at times. You might be having a difficult time with your mental health. It is best to think carefully before starting study.

What can I do before starting a course?

You can contact the course provider. This is to find out what help and support is available for students with mental health issues.

Before you start a course, you may be invited to see a disability adviser. They can tell you what support is available.

You could ask them the following questions.

- What support do you give to students with mental health conditions?
- Are there peer support services?
- Would I get a personal tutor who could offer me support?
- Is there a student peer support group?

What might happen after I start the course?

Once you start your course you may get allocated a tutor. They may be called a 'personal tutor' or a 'pastoral support tutor'.

Your tutor can offer you advice and support. You can visit them to talk about problems you are having with stress or course work. They may be able to arrange extra help for you during your studies.

What type of help could I ask for?

You could ask for extra help during your studies. This might include:

- having a note taker during lessons,
- having study support to do research for assignments,
- doing exams in a separate room to other people,
- having a seat near a door or a window,
- getting extra time for exams and assignments,
- getting a laptop so you can work from home if you are too ill to come into class,
- counselling from the university or an external service, or
- benefits and money advice.

For more information, see 'What are reasonable adjustments' in [section 4](#) of this factsheet.

What are peer support services?

Some course providers have support services run by students. These are known as peer support services.

They may offer emotional support, or they may run an advice centre or legal service.

Many students' unions will have a student disability or equality officer. They may be able to offer support if you have any problems during your course.

Some universities may have an emotional support line run by other students.

Student Minds is UK based student mental health charity. They can offer support to both students and staff who are having challenges with their mental health. You can find their contact details in the [Useful contacts](#) section below.

What is peer mentoring?

Some course providers may have peer mentoring schemes. This means that you and another student will pair up to support each other.

They should be someone who understands mental illness or your condition. You can ask for their support when you need it or meet regularly for a chat.

[Top](#)

4. How much information should I share about my mental health?

When you start a course, you may feel anxious about sharing information about your mental health.

How much information you share is up to you.

You could think about the following points to help you decide about what information to share.

Should I share a trusted contact?

When you start university, you can:

- share contact details of a trusted contact with university staff, and
- agree they can contact them at any time if they have concerns about your mental health.

A trusted contact can be someone like a family member or a friend.

The university might have a paper or online form that you can complete to do this.

What are reasonable adjustments?

Disabled people are protected from unfair treatment under a law called the Equality Act. This includes if you are disabled and in education.¹

You may have a disability under the Act if you have a mental illness.

Colleges, universities, and other course providers may ask you if you have a disability. Or you might tell them that you do. You could ask for 'reasonable adjustments.'²

These are changes that they can make to try and reduce the disadvantage you have because of your disability.

There is no list of what reasonable adjustments you could ask for. They are personal to you, your needs, and your disability. But for ideas, you can see [section 3](#) of this factsheet under 'What type of help could I ask for?'

You might choose not to share that you have a mental illness. The course provider has no obligation to make reasonable adjustments for you.

You can find more information about '**Discrimination and mental health – The Equality Act 2010**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Does having a mental illness affect some course applications?

There are some professional courses where having a mental illness may affect your application.

You will need to be assessed for 'fitness to practise' before starting the course.

The 'fitness to practise' rules exist to make sure someone can deal with the demands of the career.

You will be asked to share information about your mental health if you want to study for a job involving children or vulnerable adults. Such as a:

- doctor³,
- nurse⁴,
- member of the armed forces.⁵
- teacher⁶, or
- social worker.⁷

If you want to do these jobs, you should look at their 'fitness to practise' regulations. This is to make sure this is the right choice for you.

[Top](#)

5. What financial support can I get while studying?

Are there grants and bursaries for adult learners?

As an adult learner, you can apply for grants and bursaries to try to help pay for courses and training.

Usually, you do not have to pay this money back. For most grants and bursaries, you apply directly to the organisation that pays them out. They will have an application process and will be able to tell you if you qualify.

You can search for organisations that offer educational grants and bursaries. You can use the grant search on the **Turn2Us** website here: <https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk>

What are hardship funds?

Some course providers offer extra money if you are having money issues. You can contact your course provider to find out if you are able to get some help.

Can I get funding for higher education?

You might be studying for a degree or other higher-level qualification. You may be able to apply for a loan or grant to pay for your tuition fees and living costs.

You might be able to apply for:

- student loans, including tuition fee loans and maintenance loans, or
- career development loans

You can find out more here: www.gov.uk/education/student-grants-bursaries-scholarships

What are disabled students' allowances (DSAs)?⁸

You might have a mental health condition that is defined as a disability under the Equality Act. You may qualify for a disabled students' allowance.

The allowance is to help you with additional costs you have because of your mental health. This could be funding for a computer, travel costs or other expenses.

You can find out more information on whether you can get a DSA, and how to apply at: www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim

What about welfare benefits?

Disabled students may be able to claim some welfare benefits.

You can find more information about **Personal independence payment (PIP)**, **Employment and support allowance** and **Universal credit** at: www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org

You can contact a local welfare benefits advice organisation to get advice on benefits you might be able to claim. You can search for benefits advisers by using the following websites.

- **Turn 2 Us:** <https://advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk>
- **Citizens Advice:** www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Can I get help with health costs?

You may be able to get help with prescription costs, dental and optical charges. This will depend on things such as your age, medical condition or what benefits you claim.⁹

You can get more information on the **NHS Low Income Scheme** website: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme

Or you can contact them on the details below.

NHS Low Income Scheme helpline

Phone: 0300 330 1343

Online contact form: <https://nhsbsa-live.powerappsportals.com/contact-us>

Can I get council tax exemption?

As a full-time student you may not have to pay council tax if you only live with other full-time students.¹⁰

You can find out more information here: www.gov.uk/council-tax/discounts-for-full-time-students

[Top](#)

6. What if I have difficulties while studying?

You may already know how your mental illness affects your ability to study. But if you do not, here are some things to look out for.

You may find it difficult to:

- concentrate,
- work in groups,
- work with other people, like students or teachers,
- go to everywhere you need to, or get there on time,
- be around large groups of people,
- do all the work you need to for your course,
- meet deadlines, or
- live in shared accommodation.

If you are finding these things hard, then speak to someone as soon as possible. You can speak to someone you feel most comfortable talking to. You might be able to get support to help you.

You could talk to:

- your personal tutor,
- a relative or friend,
- the student support service,
- your GP,
- your psychiatrist, if you have one, or
- religious or spiritual leader.

Your friend or relative could help you to make an appointment to see your GP or psychiatrist.

If you have moved to the place where you study, you might not have had time to register with a GP. If you need help you can get an appointment as a temporary patient. The student support service may be able to help you find your nearest GP.

You can also find local GP surgeries on the following NHS website:
www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP

You can find more information about **‘GPs and your mental health’** at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Who can help me if I think I have been discriminated against?

You might think that you have been discriminated against. You may be able to get independent advice and support from your Students’ Union, if you are in one.

The **Equality Advisory Support Service** will also be able to advise you. Their details are in the [Useful contacts](#) section of this factsheet below.

You can find more information about '**Discrimination and mental health – The Equality Act 2010**' at www.rethink.org. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

[Top](#)

Further Reading

Dealing with exam stress

By Young Minds

Young Minds are the UK's leading charity for children and young people's mental health. They've produced this information on how to deal with exam stress.

Website link: www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress

Useful Contacts

Disability Rights UK – Disabled Students Helpline

This organisation offers information and advice about all areas of the Equality Act and how you are protected. They have a student advice helpline.

Phone: 0330 995 0414

Email: students@disabilityrightsuk.org

Website: www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/helplines/disabled-students-helpline

Citizens Advice

They offer free, confidential advice on different areas including your discrimination, laws and rights and welfare benefits.

Webchat: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/web-chat-service

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Equality Advisory Support Service

EASS gives advice on discrimination and human rights to people in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Phone: 0808 800 0082

Address: FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521

Email: Via website here www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Gov.UK

The Government website has different financial information that may be helpful for students. There is information on general student finance as well.

Website: www.gov.uk/student-finance

Open University

General enquiries about distance learning courses and student finance at the Open University.

Telephone: 0300 303 5303

Email: www.open.ac.uk/contact/new

Website: www.open.ac.uk

National Careers Service

Provides information, advice and guidance to adults based in the UK. They can help you make decisions on learning, training and work.

Phone: 0800 100 900

Website: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk>

Student Minds

This is a UK based student mental health charity. They can offer support to both students and staff struggling with their mental health.

Phone: 0113 343 8440 (general enquiries only, not a crisis line)

Email: info@studentminds.org.uk

Website: www.studentminds.org.uk

Broken links?

All links to other pages on our website, and other websites, worked when we last reviewed this page. If you notice that any links no longer work, you can help us by emailing us at feedback@rethink.org and we will fix them. Many thanks.

Incorrect information?

All the information in this factsheet was correct, to the best of our knowledge, when we published it. If you think any information is incorrect you can help us by emailing us at feedback@rethink.org. Many thanks.

References

- ¹ GOV.UK. *Equality Act 2010 Guidance*. www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance#overview (accessed 25 April 2024).
- ² Scope. *Disability discrimination by private and public service providers*. See para 2. <https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/disability-discrimination-by-private-and-public-service-providers> (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ³ General Medical Council. *Professional behaviour and fitness to practice*. <https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/guidance/student-professionalism-and-ftp/professional-behaviour-and-fitness-to-practise#:~:text=Fitness%20to%20practise%20is%20a,to%20practise%20may%20be%20impaired> (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ⁴ Nursing & Midwifery Council. *Health and character as a student*. www.nmc.org.uk/education/becoming-a-nurse-midwife-nursing-associate/guidance-for-students/ (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ⁵ British Army. *How to join*. <https://apply.army.mod.uk/how-to-join/can-i-join/medical> (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ⁶ Department for Education. *Initial teacher training: criteria and supporting advice* www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria/initial-teacher-training-itt-criteria-and-supporting-advice#c13-suitability (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ⁷ Social Work England. *Professional standards and guidance*. Standards 6.6 & 6.7 www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/guidance/professional-standards-guidance/ (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ⁸ UCAS. *Disabled Students' Allowances*. www.ucas.com/finance/additional-funding/disabled-students-allowances-dsas (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ⁹ NHS Business Services Authority. *NHS Low Income Scheme* www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme (accessed 24 April 2024)
- ¹⁰ GOV.UK. *Council Tax/ Discount for full-time students*. www.gov.uk/council-tax/full-time-students (accessed 24 April 2024)

This factsheet is available in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0808 801 0525
Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)

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:

RAIS
PO Box 18252
Solihull
B91 9BA

or call us on 0808 801 0525

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Equality, rights, fair treatment, and the maximum quality of life for all those severely affected by mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org



rethink.org



Patient Information Forum

Need more help?

Go to rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, 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 on: 0808 801 0525 between 9:30am to 4pm, 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 rethink.org/donate or call 0121 522 7007 to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.

