



Your physical health

when staying in a mental health inpatient unit



What can I expect?

When you come into a mental health unit, staff will check your physical health. They will check your blood pressure, your weight and your blood sugar levels. None of these tests are risky or painful. Staff will also ask you general health questions, e.g. about diet and exercise.

Why am I being asked about my physical health in a mental health service?

The health check is to pick up on early signs of health conditions, like diabetes or heart disease. These conditions are common in the general population and are more common in people with severe mental illness. Things that increase the chance of developing these conditions are:

- taking antipsychotic medication
- smoking
- lack of exercise
- poor diet and drinking alcohol

This is why staff will ask you questions about your health.

By doing health checks when you're in hospital, staff can help pick up on any problems and do something to help. For example, they could refer you to a health professional who can help you cut down on smoking. That's why it's important to have the check, if you possibly can.

What if I don't want a physical health check?

You don't have to have these tests or answer these questions, if you don't want to. It is not a compulsory part of your treatment. You might want to ask staff for more details about the check, before you decide.

If you are not feeling up to a physical health check, you can ask staff to wait and do the check when you feel better.

What about my medication?

Wherever possible, you should be involved in decisions about your care, even if you are sectioned. You can ask your psychiatrist or pharmacist for more information about your medication and discuss the benefits and side-effects with them. Some mental health medications have physical side-effects, such as weight gain or disrupting sleep.

Some medications react badly with each other. It's important to tell your psychiatrist or pharmacist if you are taking any other medication, including anything you've bought over the counter.

You can find out more in the Medications factsheets on the Rethink Mental Illness website www.rethink.org

Can I smoke when I am staying in an inpatient unit?

Many mental health wards are now smoke-free so you might not be able to smoke while you are in hospital. If this is the case, you should get support, such as help to quit or a nicotine replacement. Do ask for this, if you need it.

What happens when I leave the ward?

When you are discharged, staff will send a letter to your GP. This letter will include information about your physical health check and your medication. You should get a copy too.

Your mental health team is responsible for doing physical health checks for 12 months after you start taking medication. After this, your GP will invite you to a yearly physical health check and to any other relevant checks. You can ask your GP about your medication and about getting more support to live healthily.

If you have been on medication for over a year, you can have a medication review. Just ask your psychiatrist, GP or pharmacist.

What about support from other people?

If you would like certain family members or friends to be involved in your care, you should tell staff and sign a consent form. This form can be kept with your medical records so that all staff know who you want information shared with. You can take away permission later, if you change your mind.

If you are currently sectioned under the Mental Health Act, you are entitled to have an Independent Mental Health Advocate. They will explain your rights and make sure your wishes about your treatment are properly considered.

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