

# Take the first step ... towards control of your physical health

Rethink  
Mental  
Illness.



## Did you know that you may be able to get a full Physical Health Check every year?

People on their GP's severe mental illness (SMI) register, which usually includes those with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder or other psychoses, should receive a full Physical Health Check each year from their GP.

Some aspects of living with a severe mental illness mean that people can be more likely to develop physical health issues. Everyone's situation is different but we know that good mental and physical health go hand in hand.

**A Physical Health Check is an important first step towards taking charge of your physical health and being the best you, you can be.**

## What is a Physical Health Check?

Annual Physical Health Checks for people with severe mental illness (SMI) are designed to pick up on signs that someone may be at risk of diabetes, stroke or heart problems. This means action can be taken before these issues become more serious. A full check involves six different elements:

**Blood pressure** – your blood pressure will be checked.

**Blood glucose** – a blood sample will be taken for a blood test, where the level of glucose (sugar) in your blood will be checked.

**Height and weight** – you will be asked your height and be weighed during your appointment.

**Blood lipid** – a blood sample will be taken for a blood test, where the level of cholesterol in your blood will be checked.

**Smoking** – you will be asked whether you smoke.

**Alcohol** – you will be asked how much alcohol you drink.

Details of how these checks are undertaken are available in our **Physical Health Check tool**.

## How can the Rethink Mental Illness Physical Health Check tool help me with my Check?

Our tool is designed to support you before, during and after your Physical Health Check.

The tool is yours to keep, personalise and use as you go through the process of receiving your Check. It can be printed out or filled in on a computer, and should be used to help you, your carer, etc and health professionals to record the different results of your Check and detail possible follow-up support. The tool can also be used to keep track of appointments and has information about other routine health checks that you may be entitled to. Download the tool by visiting [www.rethink.org/physicalhealthchecktool](http://www.rethink.org/physicalhealthchecktool)

# Frequently asked questions

## Who delivers Physical Health Checks?

Where and who you receive your Check from will depend on the arrangements in your area. You might receive a Check in your GP surgery from a GP or practice nurse, or from another health professional in a different setting.

## My family member/friend is my carer. Can they come with me to the appointment?

If you have someone that provides you with support, they should be allowed to accompany you to your Physical Health Check appointment.

## What if I am not able to travel to a Physical Health Check? Can I receive the Check at home?

If you are concerned about travelling to and from your appointment, check whether your local council offers or has details for local community transport options. These may be run by local charities.

If you are housebound or have difficulty leaving home, it may be possible to arrange to receive a Check at home. You would need to ask your health professional about this while requesting your Check.

## What happens after my Physical Health Check?

Receiving a Check should only be the start of your journey towards taking charge of your physical health. If you and your health professional identify actions that need to be taken, you should have a discussion about what you can do next.

Depending on the arrangements in your area, you may be able to access follow-up support such as exercise schemes, weight management support, cooking classes, dietary advice, support to stop smoking or to drink less alcohol, or a Personal Budget which can support you to take positive steps around your physical health.

## GPs have enough on their plate – I don't want to bother them by asking for a Check!

GPs have a lot of work to do and patients to see, and it is understandable that you might worry about asking for a routine appointment. However, GPs have been asked to provide these Checks by NHS England and while they are a routine appointment, this doesn't mean they aren't important! As well as helping to prevent potential physical health issues from escalating, taking action early can also help to save you and your GP time in the future.

## I'm ready to take the first step – how should I request my Check?

If you want to query with your GP about getting a Physical Health Check, you or your carer should:

- State that as someone living with schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder or other psychoses, that you believe you are entitled to an annual Physical Health Check for people with severe mental illness and say you would like to access the check
- Ask how Physical Health Checks for people with severe mental illness are delivered in your area (e.g. whether this is with the GP or practice nurse or from another health professional)
- Ask how you can book an appointment to receive a Physical Health Check
- To provide enough time to offer the Check meaningfully, you may need to ask for a double appointment or follow-up appointment if the Check identifies issues that need action

Alternatively, if you are already in touch with community mental health services, you may want to ask the staff how you can access your Check.

Find detailed advice and download our tool at [rethink.org/physicalhealthchecktool](https://rethink.org/physicalhealthchecktool)