



Recovery

This factsheet looks at what it means to recover from a mental illness. We focus on personal recovery and suggest different ways that you can help your own recovery. Not everything in this factsheet will help you to recover from your illness. But we hope that it will help you to work out what you find useful.



- You can recover from mental illness. Recovery means different things to different people. Personal recovery is about working towards something that is important to you. And having hope for the future.
- You may still have mental health symptoms during your recovery.
- Medical treatment may help you towards recovery but there are other options that you could try instead or at the same time.
- Recovery is something you do for yourself. Someone else can't do it for you. Other people may be able to help if you want them to.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What is recovery?](#)
2. [What can help me recover?](#)

1. What is recovery?

There are 2 different meanings for recovery. However, they may overlap. These are:

- clinical recovery, and
- personal recovery.

Your doctor might have talked to you about 'recovery'. Some doctors and health professionals think of recovery as no longer having mental health symptoms. Sometimes this is called 'clinical recovery'. Dealing with symptoms is important to a lot of people. But we think recovery is wider than this, we call it 'personal recovery.'

Personal recovery means that you are able to live a meaningful life. What you want to in your life will be different to what someone else wants to do with their life. Don't be afraid to think about what you would like to do and work towards that goal.

Below are some ways you can think of recovery.

- Taking steps to get closer to where you would like to be. For example you may want a better social life.
- Building hope for the future. You could change your goals, skills, roles or outlook.¹

Recovery is an ongoing process. It is normal to have difficulties or setbacks along the way. You could describe yourself as 'recovered' at any stage in your recovery if you feel things are better than they were before.

2. What can help me recover?

You will recover in your own way. There is no right or wrong way, it is personal. Some people call this process a 'recovery journey'.

Think about these questions.

- What do I want to have done by this time next year?
- How can I do it?
- Do I need support to do it?
- Who can support me?

Hope

Hope is a key part of recovery. You might find it helpful to read stories from people about their recovery. You can find this information online. Have a look at the following websites as a first step.

- www.time-to-change.org.uk/personal-stories
- www.slam.nhs.uk/patients-and-carers/patient-information/recovery
- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/
- www.cnwl.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CNWL_mental_health_employment_recovery_booklet.pdf
- www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/recovery
- www.power2u.org/recovery-stories.html

You could join a support group. A support group is where people come together to share information, experiences and give each other support.

You might be able to find a local group by searching online. If there isn't a group in your area you may be able to find an online support group or forum. Rethink Mental Illness is linked to support groups in some areas. You can find out what is available in your area if you follow this link: www.rethink.org/about-us/our-support-groups. Or you can call the Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service on 0300 5000 927 for more information.

Low self-esteem and a negative outlook can be a barrier for hope for the future. They can be linked to a mental illness. Recognising and understanding similar issues within yourself can be the first step towards building hope.

Acceptance

Your recovery journey may be easier if you learn to accept your illness and the difficulties it causes.² Acceptance may help you to make positive changes and help you to reach new goals. You may have to accept that there are some things that you can't do anymore. But focus on what you can do. You are more likely to reach your goal if it is realistic.

It might help you to read about your illness and talk to other people with the same diagnosis.

Spiritual beliefs and practices can help you to make sense of your experiences and find meaning. You can find more about '**Spirituality and Mental Illness**' 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.

Control

You are in control of you. Take control of your life. Find out what makes you happy. Find out what makes your mental health symptoms better and worse. Do what is best for you.

Control may mean that you are more involved with your medication and treatment options. An advocate may be able to help you if you struggle to get your opinion heard.

Speak to your doctor or other health professionals if you want more support to do what you would like to do. Your local authority may be able to offer you more support through a social care assessment.

You can find more information about:

- Medication. Choice and managing problems
- Advocacy
- Social Care. Assessment and eligibility

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

Stability

Money and housing worries can cause a lot of stress and make mental health problems worse. Secure finances and a suitable place to live can be important for your recovery. Get help early if you start to have money or housing problems.

You can find more information about:

- Dealing with debt
- Housing options

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.

Relationships

Contact with people can help you to stay well. Contact with people could be the following.

- Face to face: you could visit a friend. Or speak to a family member online. You could use a free programme such as 'Skype'
- Telephone
- Letters: you could send letters through the post, use e-mail or text
- Online forums: this is where people talk about a particular subject

You do not have to mention your mental illness unless you want to. Talking to people about anything you like can have a positive effect on your mental health.

Unfortunately, not all relationships are positive. It is important to recognise when your relationships with others is having a negative effect on you.

Below are some things you can do if you want to make more contact with other people.

- Get back in touch with people you already know.
- Join support groups.

- Join online forums.
- Join a recovery college.
- Volunteer with a charity you care about.
- Contact a befriending service.
- Look for local classes or clubs that interest you.
- Get help from the NHS or local authority.
- Speak to emotional support lines.
- Get into work or training.

Friends and family members can offer support to you and help to build hope for your future. You could tell them about any care plans that you have and tell them about any goals you have. They may be able to offer you better support if they understand your illness. You could suggest that they read information about your illness. We have factsheets on different mental health conditions which you can download at www.rethink.org.

Treatment

The right medical treatment is important to many people. It is often the first step towards recovery.³

Often there are different medications that are used to treat the same symptoms. You may start your recovery journey by finding a medication that helps your symptoms and has the least amount of side effects. Medication is helpful for a lot of people but not everyone needs it to recover.

Other treatment options may be important to you such as talking therapy, art therapy or complementary therapies. But complementary therapies are not available on the NHS.

You can find more information about:

- Talking treatments
- Medication. Choice and managing problems
- Complementary and alternative treatments

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.

Lifestyle

Making small lifestyle changes can improve your wellbeing and can help your recovery.

Routine helps many people with their mental wellbeing. It will help to give a structure to your day and may give you a sense of purpose. This could be a simple routine such as eating at the same time each day, going to bed at the same time each day and buying food once per week.

John's Story

John has depression. He has noticed that he can manage his condition well if he has regular exercise and sleep.

John exercises for at least 30 minutes a day. He walks to his local shop to buy his milk and newspaper on most days. If the weather is bad, John uses a strong wooden box to step up and down from while he watches the television.

John knows that his mood will go low if he doesn't get regular sleep. He monitors his sleep with a diary. John has agreed with his GP that he will take a sleeping tablet if he has not slept well for 2 nights in a row.

John meditates before he goes to bed. He doesn't do this every night. He finds it helpful if he has a stressful day.

You may want new activities to add to your routine. New activities can help you to learn new skills and meet new people.

You could try the following.

- Volunteer
- Study
- Get a job
- Do housework or gardening
- Learn a new hobby
- Go to a class
- Get a pet
- Exercise

Sleep

Sleep is very important. Your mental health symptoms may feel worse if you are tired. Long term sleep problems can lead to mood disorders such as anxiety and depression.⁴

Eat Well

You can feel emotionally well if you eat well. Eating well will mean something different to different people. Generally it means.⁵

- Your weight stays normal. Not too low or too high for your height.
- Your weight stays stable. Not going up and down all the time.
- You eat the necessary food groups regularly. Such as fruit and vegetables.
- Eating is enjoyable.

Exercise

Exercise can improve your mental health. It can help with:⁶

- depression and anxiety symptoms,
- negative mood,
- low self esteem and social withdrawal, and
- thinking clearly.

Exercise can be as good as antidepressants or talking treatments for mild depression. GP's prescribe exercise in some areas in the UK.⁷

Make sure you reward yourself for any positive changes you make.

You can find more information about lifestyle changes in our '**Good Health Guide**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team and ask them to send you a copy of the guide.

Recovery College

Recovery colleges are part of the NHS. They offer free courses about mental health to help you manage your symptoms. They can help you to take control of your life and become an expert in your own wellbeing and recovery. You can usually self refer to a recovery college. But the college may inform your care team.

Unfortunately recovery colleges are not available in all areas. To see if there is a recovery college in your area you can use a search engine such as Google. Or contact Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service on 0300 5000 927.

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Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Plus. Formerly living without Depression and Manic Depression - Mary Ellen Copeland, PhD.

The Wellness Recovery Action Plan® or WRAP® is a self-designed wellness process. You can use a WRAP to get well, stay well and make your life your own. It was developed in 1997 by a group of people who were searching for ways to overcome their own mental health issues and move on to fulfilling their life dreams and goals.

Website: <http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com>

Recovery Devon

An independent community of people who support recovery and wellbeing.

Website: www.recoverydevon.co.uk

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¹Rethink Mental Illness. Recovery Insights: Learning from lived experience. *Recovery Series* 2009 (Volume 3) page 6-7.
<https://www.rethink.org/about-us/service-evaluation/service-user-involvement> (accessed 5th September 2016).

² As note 1

³ As note 1, at page 6.

⁴ NHS Choices. *Why lack of sleep is bad for your health*. <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/tiredness-and-fatigue/Pages/lack-of-sleep-health-risks.aspx> (accessed 5th September 2016)

⁵ Royal college of psychiatrists. *Eating well and mental health*. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/eatingwellandmentalhealth.aspx> (accessed 5th September 2016)

⁶ University of Nebraska Medical Center; Creighton University, University of Nebraska Medical Center; Omaha VA Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska. Exercise for mental health. *Primary Care Companion to The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* (2006)

NCBI <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1470658/> (accessed 5th September 2016)

⁷ Royal college of psychiatrists. *Physical activity and mental health*. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/treatmentswellbeing/physicalactivity.aspx> (accessed 5th September 2016)

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This factsheet is available
in large print.



Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

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 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

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

 [facebook.com/rethinkcharity](https://www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity)

 twitter.com/rethink_

 www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to www.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 0300 5000 927 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?

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