



Getting mental health support

This factsheet outlines how to seek professional mental health support for yourself or for a loved one. The support described here is available to everyone, whether you have a condition or you care for someone with a condition.

If you are experiencing distress and need to speak to someone urgently, please call the Samaritans 24/7 helpline on 116 123. If you feel at risk of harm, please call 999.

When might I need to seek support?

Around one in four people will have trouble with their mental health at some point in their lives. Difficulty with your mental health can just happen, or it might be triggered by a specific life event.

It's a common belief that seeking professional help for your mental health is something you should do only in extreme circumstances. This really isn't the case. Therapy is for anyone who feels they would benefit from talking to someone.

If you or a family member want to talk to someone about how you feel, there are lots of options available for you. Counselling and other forms of therapy are available through the NHS and privately, if you feel talking to someone might benefit you.

You may want to speak to someone about a new diagnosis, a recent deterioration in your health, your feelings about being a parent or carer of a person with a muscle-wasting condition, or anything else that might be causing you difficulty or emotional distress.

How do I request this support?

If you are seeking support for yourself, all you need to do is visit your GP. Your GP is likely to ask you some questions, and might ask you to fill out a questionnaire tracking your mood and behaviour over the past few weeks. This will help them decide what kind of support might be most beneficial for you. They will then make a referral to your local mental health services.

In some areas, you may be able to self-refer to your local IAPT service (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies). Your GP's surgery can put you in touch with your local service, or you can find one online using your postcode.

[www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Psychological-therapies-\(IAPT\)/LocationSearch/10008](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Psychological-therapies-(IAPT)/LocationSearch/10008)

If you go to a specialist neuromuscular clinic, you can also ask your consultant to see if they offer any mental health support specifically for people with muscle-wasting conditions. This option is not available in all clinics.



What happens after I've been referred?

After you or your GP have referred you to your local mental health or IAPT service, you may get a phone call from the service asking some more in-depth questions. They may discuss with you what you are hoping to achieve through therapy, or if there is anything specific you feel you need to talk about.

Once the service has this information, they may recommend a specific type of therapy for you. You can find out more about these in the section below. Once you've agreed to a particular type of therapy, you will be put on a waiting list.

The waiting list for mental health support differs depending on where you live, and it's worth asking the mental health service if they have any interim support available. Some IAPT services offer group therapy sessions or courses to help you in the meantime, and they may also give you a crisis line number to call if you're in urgent need of support.

What are the different types of therapy?

Depending on the cause of your mental health difficulty, or how it's affecting you, you may be offered a number of different types of therapy.

▶ **Counselling**

Counselling provides you with a safe place in which you can talk to a trained health professional about your thoughts and feelings. The aim of counselling is to help you make sense of your feelings and find ways to resolve or live with them. You will speak to the same person usually once a week for up to an hour. Your counsellor will listen and guide you through talking about your feelings, as speaking out loud can often help you put your thoughts in order.

▶ **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**

CBT is a type of therapy that teaches you coping skills for dealing with different issues. It focuses on how your thoughts and feelings affect your patterns of behaviour. The therapy works by helping you to change behaviours that may be causing you difficulty, and to challenge thoughts and feelings that can be harmful. CBT is normally a short-term treatment, in which you meet with the same therapist each week and complete 'homework' outside of your sessions to help you challenge and manage your thoughts and feelings.

▶ **Family therapy**

Family therapy gives a whole family the opportunity to explore a common problem together. This can include an illness or disability in the family, along with things like divorce or bereavement. The aim of family therapy is to help the family communicate with each other and work through their feelings together. Sessions tend to be longer (up to an hour and a half) and usually take place a few weeks apart.



▶ **Relationship/couples counselling**

Relationship counselling can be helpful where a couple is experiencing a common problem that may be affecting their relationship.

▶ **Group therapy**

In group therapy, you and other people who share your experience will meet for group therapy sessions with a therapist. This provides an opportunity for you to get support and advice from other people who are in a similar position to you.

What support is available for children?

Most of the information in this factsheet applies to children as well as adults, but there are a few differences.

▶ **CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)**

CAMHS covers all services that work with children and young people who need support with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing. If you feel your child would benefit from emotional support or one of the therapies mentioned in this factsheet, your GP will be able to refer you to your local CAMHS who can provide this support.

▶ **Play therapy**

This can be beneficial for younger children who have a health condition or disability, particularly where they may need to undergo medical and surgical procedures as part of their treatment. Play therapy is often offered in hospitals to help children make sense of frightening or unfamiliar experiences. It can help to calm children and help them cope with pain. CAMHS can often refer you to play therapists or specialists, and they can also advise parents and carers about how to implement play therapy as part of your child's emotional care at home.

▶ **Counselling at school**

Access to counselling in schools varies depending on where you live, but in most areas you can get counselling support for your children through the school. A therapist from the local authority will visit the school and can normally offer counselling sessions within the school day.

▶ **Counselling through the hospital**

Many paediatric units have counselling available for patients. Speak to your child's consultant, specialist nurse or care advisor to find out what's available and how to access it.

What about support at university?

Being away from home for the first time can be challenging for anyone, and there's normally support available within the university if you feel you need support while studying.

How you get this support differs from university to university, so check the website or speak to your student services team to find out.



You can still get therapy through your local IAPT service, if you'd prefer this to speaking to a therapist within your university.

What about remote options?

Many of these therapies are delivered face-to-face, but there are also remote options available. Once you've been referred, speak to your local mental health services about whether there are options for you to have therapy over the phone, online or by video call, and decide what you feel will work for you.

In some areas of the UK it is possible to self-refer to Ieso Digital Health, who provide cognitive behavioural therapy free on the NHS via an interactive online service. Find out whether this is available to you using the link below.

www.iesohealth.com/en-gb/patients

The NHS has also developed a free mental health and wellbeing app called WellMind, which is designed to help you with feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.

Is there a therapy specifically for people with muscle-wasting conditions?

Currently there is no specific type of therapy recommended for people with muscle-wasting conditions. All the therapies listed within this factsheet, however, are designed to help you manage your thoughts and feelings, which could centre on any topic including your health condition or disability.

There is currently a research project underway to examine the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) for people with muscle-wasting conditions. ACT has already proven effective for people with cancer and other long-term conditions, such as multiple sclerosis. It is designed to help accept a change in your life that you cannot control. The results are not yet available from the study, but they are expected in 2019.

Is there any support for carers?

Most local areas have carer support groups and advice lines for carers, including young carers. Follow the link below to find out what support is available for carers in your area:

www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Carers-support-services/LocationSearch/374

The organisation Carers UK offers support and advice to carers and their families:

www.carersuk.org.

Can I get this support privately?

Therapy on the NHS is free, but if you wish to get support privately, you can do so by finding a therapist on the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) website.

Private therapy can cost anywhere between £10 and £70 a session. Some local charities offer counselling to people in their area on a sliding scale of cost, depending on your income. They may also offer counselling for free.

If you're looking for a therapist privately, it is important to check that they are registered with a professional body. The following organisations list only registered therapists:

- ▶ The Counselling Directory
- ▶ The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
- ▶ The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)
- ▶ The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)
- ▶ The British Psychological Society (BPS)

What if I don't want therapy?

You may recognise that speaking to someone might help you work through your feelings, but might not feel ready for therapy yet. This is okay and while it is important to seek help if you need it, going to see a therapist can sometimes feel like a big step.

In the meantime, you can use the helplines listed at the end of this factsheet if you want to speak to someone anonymously.

If you don't want therapy because you've had a bad experience in the past, it can be a good idea to try again but be open with your GP or mental health service about what didn't work for you last time. For example, you can request a different therapist if you don't feel your current one is working for you.

Helplines and out-of-hours support

The following phone lines are available to call if you want to talk to someone anonymously.

- ▶ **Samaritans (24 hours)**
Confidential support for people experiencing emotional distress
116 123
- ▶ **SANEline (4.30pm – 10.30pm)**
An out-of-hours mental health helpline offering emotional support and guidance
0300 304 7000
- ▶ **YoungMinds**
Information about child and adolescent mental health for parents
0808 802 5544
- ▶ **Childline**
A helpline for children who need support
0800 1111



- ▶ **Campaign Against Men Living Miserably (CALM)**
Support for men living in the UK who need information or support
0800 585858
- ▶ **The Silver Line**
A helpline for older people who need emotional support
0800 470 80 90

Disclaimer

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Here for you

The friendly staff in the care and support team at the Muscular Dystrophy UK's London office are available on **0800 652 6352** or **info@musculardystrophyuk.org** from 8.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday to offer free information and emotional support.

If they can't help you, they are more than happy to signpost you to specialist services close to you, or to other people who can help.

www.musculardystrophyuk.org