



Looking after your mental health

Living with a long-term lung condition can affect many aspects of your life. You'll have physical symptoms, like breathlessness. But living with a lung condition can also affect your mental wellbeing and how you feel.

You are not alone. In this information we explain why mental health can be affected when you have a lung condition, the different mental health issues you might face and ways you can manage or treat them. We also have information on where you can go for more advice and support.

If you have more questions or just want to chat, call our helpline on **03000 030 555**

Your mental health when living with a long-term lung condition

Living with a long-term lung condition can affect many aspects of your life. You'll have physical symptoms, like getting out of breath and feeling tired. Lung conditions can also affect your mood, how you feel, and your ability to cope with daily life.

You are not alone. It's important to know there are ways of coping, and treatments are available to help you feel better.

What's the link between lung conditions and mental health problems?

If you live with a long-term lung condition, you might find that:

- you have a persistent cough or feel so breathless you stay at home more
- your breathing problems have stopped you doing what you love.
- you don't sleep as well and lose interest in your usual activities
- you feel frustrated that you can't do the things you used to do
- you may not like needing regular treatment and support from others
- you worry about the future with your condition

This can leave you feeling angry, frustrated, low or hopeless. These emotions can be symptoms of depression.

It is also very common to feel anxious. Your main symptom may be getting short of breath or tightness in your chest, which can be very frightening. Being frightened can make us feel out of breath and a vicious circle can develop.

People often experience symptoms of anxiety and depression at the same time. That, in turn, can make your lung condition worse:

- you find physical activity difficult or worry about getting too breathless, so you avoid it
- you avoid social situations, leaving you feeling isolated
- you avoid asking for support from friends and family.

Experiencing mental health conditions like anxiety and depression is a normal reaction to living with a long-term lung condition. Remember that many other people have mental health problems and have recovered from them.

What mental health problems might I experience?

Many people with long-term lung conditions experience mental health problems as well as their condition. You might feel anxious, have a low mood, or symptoms of depression. It's very common to experience anxiety and depression together.

You might have experienced traumatic events because of your lung condition. For example, spending time in an intensive care ward, or if you require mechanical assistance to breathe. You may have flash backs which do not get better over time. This can lead to a condition called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/overview). This is an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events. If you had had depression or anxiety in the past, or if you don't have much support from friends or family, you are more susceptible to develop PTSD after a traumatic event.

It is important if you notice the signs or symptoms of a mental health condition you seek help from your health care professional. Treatment and support are available to help you.

It can be hard to admit or to recognise if you're feeling low or anxious. The NHS Choices mood self-assessment tool (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/depression-anxiety-self-assessment-quiz) can help you better understand how you've been feeling recently. And once you've completed the questionnaire, it will point you in the right direction for support and advice tailored for you.

Loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness and social isolation can affect many of us across all walks of life.

Loneliness is how you feel about your level of social contact and the quality of your relationships. Loneliness doesn't always mean you are on your own. You can feel lonely and have lots of friends, be in a relationship and see people on a regular basis.

Social isolation is about the number of social contacts you have. Having a small number of social contacts doesn't always mean a person is lonely – this can be a choice.

Loneliness can lead to social isolation and social isolation can lead to loneliness. Both can occur at the same time.

While feeling lonely isn't a mental health condition, it can make a mental health condition worse. And having a long-term lung condition can also make you feel lonely. Having a condition that affects what you can do can make you miss out on things, and in turn make you feel lonely. You might feel like no one understands what you're going through with your condition, and you have no one to talk to about it.

Talking to other people who understand what you're going through can be a big help. Join a BLF support group to learn more about living with a lung condition and make friends in your local area (www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathe-easy). You can also join our online community, where you can chat 24 hours a day, 7 days a week about whatever's on your mind. Go to www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/web-community

There are things you can do to help manage loneliness and improve your wellbeing. Age UK (www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/loneliness) and Mind (www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/tips-to-manage-loneliness) have useful information on practical things you can do and places you can look to for support.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a word we use to describe our feelings of unease, worry and fear.

Everyone experiences anxiety at some time. It's a normal reaction to something we think is a threat or danger to us. We might feel tense, nervous or fearful in difficult situations, like taking an exam, moving to a new house, having an interview or going into hospital.

Sometimes - feeling anxious can be helpful, making us more alert and improving our performance. Anxious feelings usually go away but if they are very strong, or last for a long time, they can be overwhelming.

What causes anxiety?

Lots of things can cause anxiety, and anxiety affects different people in different ways. You may:

- have a lung condition that affects your breathing and your ability to do the things you used to
- be a natural worrier
- have experienced a distressing event in the past that makes you feel anxious
- experience worry or anxiety about an insecurity you have
- have faced bereavement, redundancy or divorce
- feel stressed at home or work.

Your physical health can also impact your mental wellbeing, especially if you are living with a long-term condition. You might get anxious if you don't feel in control of your condition. A stressful event like becoming breathless, having a chest infection or a stay in hospital might make you worry too.

Living with a long-term lung condition can give you symptoms that make you feel anxious. Sometimes, symptoms like tightness in your chest or getting very tired easily are similar to feelings of anxiety.

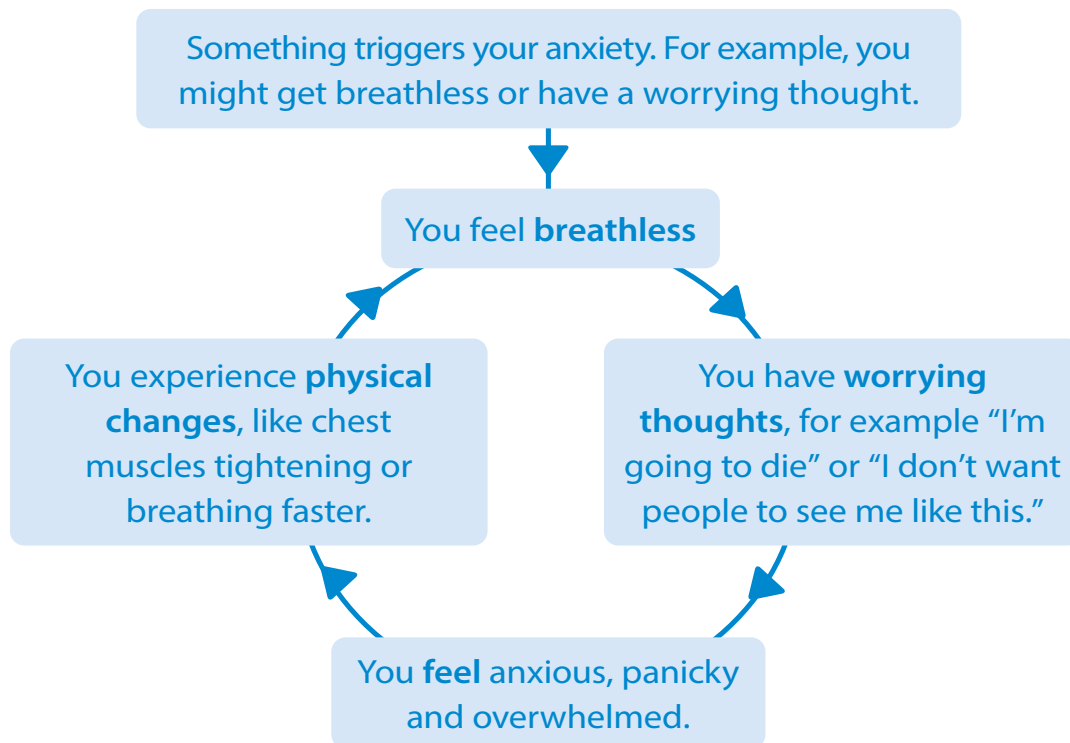
Sometimes you might not know why you feel anxious at all, and there may be no clear reason. If you don't understand why you're anxious, you can get in a downward spiral. You get anxious about feeling anxious, and so get even more anxious.

When to seek help for anxiety

Although feelings of anxiety in certain situations is completely normal, you should see your GP or another health care professional, such as your practice nurse or respiratory nurse, if anxiety is affecting your daily life or is causing you distress. Support and treatment are available on the NHS.

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Anxiety can affect our body, thoughts, and feelings in different ways. But our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are linked, and can create a vicious circle:



What are the physical symptoms of anxiety?

Anxiety feels different for everyone and can affect our bodies in different ways. These are some of the physical symptoms of anxiety you might experience:

- faster, shallower breathing
- feeling sick
- tightness or pain in the chest
- pins and needles in toes or fingers
- feeling faint or dizzy
- tense muscles and headaches
- sweating
- fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat
- raised blood pressure
- difficulty sleeping
- needing the toilet more frequently
- churning in the pit of the stomach.

How can anxiety affect your thoughts and feelings?

How anxiety affects how you feel varies for everyone. You might:

- fear the worst
- feel tense, nervous and on edge
- feel worried there is something wrong with your lungs or heart
- dwell on negative experiences or thinking over a situation again and again
- feel numb
- feel restless
- feel unable to concentrate.

Panic attacks

Panic attacks are when your body's normal response to fear, stress or excitement is exaggerated, and you get a rapid build-up of physical responses. Your breathing quickens and your body also releases hormones so your heart beats faster and your muscles tense.

During a panic attack, you might feel you can't breathe and you:

- have a pounding heart
- feel faint
- sweat
- feel sick
- have shaky limbs
- feel you're not connected to your body.

Panic attacks can happen regularly or can happen once and never again. They can be very frightening if you feel you can't breathe. You might also panic if a flare-up of your symptoms includes feeling a lot more breathless than usual. Your anxiety will, in turn, make you feel even more breathless.

During a panic attack, people often over-breathe or hyperventilate. If you start to breathe too quickly in response to a panic attack, you may breathe in more oxygen than your body needs. When you do this, the delicate balance of the gases in your lungs is upset. An amount of carbon dioxide normally stays in the blood. If you breathe in too much air too often, the carbon dioxide is pushed out through the lungs and this affects the messages the brain receives to tell you to breathe.

Mind has useful information on panic attacks and things that help to manage them at www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/panic-attacks/#WhatHelpsToManagePanicAttacks

How can I manage my anxiety?

There are a number of things you can do to help manage your anxiety.

Try out different breathing techniques

Depending on the lung condition you have, there are different techniques that help improve your breathing and help you feel better. It's a good idea to speak to a physiotherapist or respiratory nurse to find out the best techniques for you. If you don't already have one, ask for a referral. Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) courses are another way to learn effective breathing techniques.

As you try these techniques, stay calm and relaxed. This will help you breathe without using so much energy. It also helps keep the small tubes in your airways open. If you support your shoulders and arms in a relaxed way, your shoulder and neck muscles can work more efficiently. Tensing these muscles uses more oxygen and may increase your breathlessness.

Find out about breathing control and breathing techniques in our breathlessness information at www.blf.org.uk/how-to-manage-breathlessness

Share how you feel

Talking to someone you trust about your anxiety can help. You could try talking to someone close to you – a friend or family member.

We know not everyone will feel comfortable talking to family and friends about their anxiety. In fact, lots of people find it easier to talk to people who don't know them about how they're feeling.

You could:

- talk to someone with a similar lung condition at one of our support groups, exercise groups, singing groups or on a pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) course: www.blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area
- join our online forum, to chat to other people with lung conditions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/web-community
- talk to your GP, practice nurse or respiratory nurse.
- ask your GP to refer you to talking therapies, which may include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview)

If you're not sure where to turn, our helpline is there for you. Call **03000 030 555**

Keep active and exercise

Keeping active is good for our body and minds. Keeping active will take your mind off your anxious thoughts and reduce feelings of stress and tension. It will also help to keep you fit and can help you to sleep better

If feeling short of breath is a symptom of your lung condition, don't avoid physical activity. Some people become less active to cope with breathlessness. But if you reduce your levels of activity, you can actually make your breathlessness worse in the long term. Making yourself moderately breathless by being active is actually good for your lungs and won't harm you. In fact, keeping active builds up fitness in your muscles, and can improve your breathing and general health.

Discover our:

- keeping active with a lung condition advice (www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active)
- online exercise videos, designed for people with a lung condition (www.blf.org.uk/exercise-video)
- exercise handbook (www.blf.org.uk/exercise-handbook) with activities you can do at home and ways to track your progress.

You can also keep active by going on a pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) course, which combines physical exercise and covers ways you can cope with feeling short of breath and feeling anxious. It has been proven that pulmonary rehabilitation improves not only your fitness, but also your mental wellbeing. Ask your health care professional to refer you to the nearest programme.

Keep a diary

You may find keeping a note of what happens each time you get anxious or have a panic attack could help you spot patterns and triggers. You could also make a note of times when you're able to manage your anxiety successfully.

You could use our record of your mood form (PDF, 161KB) - www.blf.org.uk/sites/default/files/record_your_mood_diary.pdf

Try relaxation techniques

Relaxation is a way to stop anxiety once you spot early signs of tension. It involves being quiet, relaxing the muscles in your body, breathing slowly and deeply, and clearing your mind. Relaxation is a skill, and like any other, it takes time to learn.

There are many ways to relax. Some people can relax by exercising, listening to music, watching TV, or reading a book. Other people use relaxation techniques and follow a set of exercises. You could do this on your own, or you could join a relaxation or yoga class. There are also lots of books and apps that could help you.

Eat a healthy diet

What you eat can affect the way you feel, as well as your physical health. Eating a healthy diet can do a lot to improve your mood and your sense of wellbeing.

Managing your caffeine intake can help reduce anxiety symptoms, as caffeine use often mimics symptoms associated with anxiety. For example, restlessness, nervousness, and trouble sleeping. You may find your anxiety symptoms improve if you avoid stimulants such as coffee and alcohol.

Your gut (how you digest food) can be a good indicator of how you're feeling. If you're anxious, it can make your gut slow down or speed up. For a healthy digestion you need to have plenty of fibre and fluid, and exercise regularly.

Read more about eating well for healthier lungs at www.blf.org.uk/eating-well

Take up a hobby

Taking up a new hobby is a good way to ease anxiety. It gives you something positive to focus on, while taking your mind off negative things you might be feeling. It's also a great way to meet new people and have some fun!

You could try:

- **craft work**, such as drawing, crochet or knitting
- **music**, whether it's discovering new artists or genres, or learning an instrument yourself
- **exercise**, like walking, running, or cycling. There are plenty of local groups across the UK you can get involved with – take a look at our Keep Active information for suggestions on where to start - www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/help-and-support
- **cooking, gardening, reading or writing.**

What works for some people won't work for everyone, so explore different options of things you might enjoy.

Spend time outside

Spending time outside is good for your physical and mental wellbeing. It can help improve your mood and reduce feelings of stress.

We know not everyone will be able to easily spend time outdoors. For example, you might not have access to a garden, or your lung condition might make it difficult to get outside easily.

You can still reap the benefits of being outside by increasing the amount of nature in your everyday life. This could include growing a houseplant, planting vegetables, or listening to natural sounds like the ocean or rainfall.

Read more about how nature benefits our mental health on the Mind website at www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health

Try mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that involves giving your full attention to what is happening in the present moment. Studies show that practising mindfulness can help reduce worry and anxiety.

It involves observing what is happening in your body, mind, or surroundings in a non-judgmental way. It's a way of approaching your thoughts and feelings so you become more aware of them and react differently to them.

You can learn about and practise mindfulness by joining a group, finding one-to-one help, using an online course or app, or finding a self-help book. Read more about how mindfulness can help your mental wellbeing on the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness

Treatment for anxiety

If anxiety is affecting your day to day life or causing you distress, see your GP or speak to a health care professional.

How to assess how you've been feeling lately

Before you go to see your health care professional, it may help to think about these questions.

Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

- feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
- not being able to stop or control worrying
- little interest or pleasure in doing things
- feeling down, depressed, or hopeless

You should think about if these problems have been affecting you:

- not at all
- for several days
- for more than half the days
- nearly every day

Make a note of your answers and take them with you to discuss with your health care professional.

It can be hard to admit or to recognise if you're feeling low or anxious. The NHS Choices mood self-assessment tool (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/depression-anxiety-self-assessment-quiz) can help you better understand how you've been feeling recently. And once you've completed the questionnaire, it will point you in the right direction for support and advice tailored for you.

What treatment can I get for anxiety?

- If you haven't already, you should be offered **pulmonary rehabilitation (PR)**. PR is an important form of treatment for people living with a long-term lung condition, as it helps you become more active and understand your condition better. Research has shown PR improves not only your fitness, but your mental wellbeing as well. Ask to be referred to a course by your health care professional.
- **Self-help resources**. These are psychological therapies you can do on your own to help with problems like stress and anxiety. Have a look at the NHS website for more information at www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/self-help-therapies
- **Talking treatments**, counselling, or therapy. The most common one is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) - www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview
- **Medication**. Your GP may prescribe antidepressants or other medication. If you are offered medication, ideally talking treatments such as CBT together should also be recommended. Health care guidelines are that your health care professional should offer you other treatments first.

The NHS has more detailed information on treatment for generalised anxiety disorder in adults at www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/generalised-anxiety-disorder/treatment

Depression

Depression is a low mood that lasts for weeks or months and affects your everyday life. In its mildest form, depression can mean being in low spirits. It doesn't stop you leading your normal life, but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, people might feel suicidal.

If you need help for a mental health crisis or emergency, you should seek immediate advice. Help and support is available right now.

There are helplines you can call, or, if you don't want to talk to someone on the phone, text lines you can message. The NHS website has a page on help for suicidal thoughts, which includes a list of places you can get immediate help (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/help-for-suicidal-thoughts)

If you or a loved one needs immediate help, call 999 or visit your local A&E. A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one. You will not be wasting anyone's time.

What causes depression?

Depression can be caused by:

- long-term health problems, such as living with a lung condition
- difficult things that have happened in the past
- difficult events such as losing your job, the end of a relationship, bereavement, or family problems
- side effects of medication
- alcohol or recreational drugs.

What causes depression varies from person to person, and sometimes a variety of reasons can cause depression. Or you might become depressed without any obvious reason.

It's common to experience symptoms of depression when living with a long-term lung condition. Having a long-term lung condition can be difficult to cope with. You might be feeling low about missing out on things you used to be able to do, or frustrated at experiencing flare-ups of your condition or having treatment in hospital. And if someone already has depression, having a long-term lung condition may make their depression worse.

When does a low mood become depression?

We all have times when we feel sad, have a low mood, or feel miserable about life. But if these feelings don't go away and are interfering with your life, it could be a sign you're experiencing depression.

When should I seek help for depression?

If you think you may be depressed it's important to get help from a GP or health care professional.

Don't delay getting help. The sooner you see a doctor, the sooner you'll be on your way to recovery to feeling better.

If you are feeling down and are not sure who to turn to, you can always give our helpline a call. The friendly and supportive team will be able to offer advice and lend a caring ear. Call them on **03000 030 555**, Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

What are the symptoms of depression?

The main signs of depression are losing pleasure in things you once enjoyed and losing interest in people and your usual activities.

People with depression typically experience lots of negative thoughts as well as feelings of guilt and worthlessness. You may often criticise yourself and lack confidence.

How you might feel if you have depression

- down, upset, or tearful
- restless or irritable and tired
- guilty, worthless, and down on yourself
- empty and numb
- isolated and unable to relate to people
- finding no pleasure in life or things you usually enjoy
- no self-confidence or self-esteem
- hopeless and despairing
- suicidal.

How you might behave if you have depression

- avoiding social events and activities you usually enjoy
- finding it difficult to speak or think clearly
- difficulty remembering or concentrating on things
- difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- feeling more tired and having less energy than you usually do
- loss of appetite and losing weight, or eating too much and putting on weight
- losing interest in sex; avoiding situations

- moving very slowly, or being restless
- self-harming and suicidal behaviour.

People may have a single episode of depression, but about half of people will have more episodes. Most people will feel better within four to six months of an episode of depression, while others have symptoms for much longer.

Read more about the symptoms of depression on the Mind website at www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/symptoms

How can I manage my depression?

When you experience depression, it can be hard to find the energy to look after yourself, especially if you are living with a long-term lung condition too. There are things you can try to manage depression.

Keep active and exercise

Looking after your physical wellbeing is very important if you're depressed.

Try to keep active. This could be housework, walking to a local shop or any part of your normal routine. Try to get outside, perhaps for a short, slow walk. This will help you to keep physically fit, and you may sleep better. It can help take your mind off painful thoughts which make you more depressed.

We have resources available to help you keep active at home. Discover our:

- keeping active with a lung condition advice - www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active
- online exercise videos, designed for people with a lung condition - www.blf.org.uk/exercise-video
- exercise handbook, with activities you can do at home and ways to track your progress - www.blf.org.uk/exercise-handbook

Research has shown that pulmonary rehabilitation improves not only your fitness, but also your mental wellbeing. It's a course of information and physical exercise that covers ways you can cope with feeling low. Ask your health care professional to refer you to your closest programme.

Connect with other people

We know it can be hard to explain how you're feeling to others. You might find it difficult to talk about your depression, which could leave you feeling isolated and lonely.

Try talking to someone you trust like a friend or family member about how you're feeling. Sometimes just sharing what you're going through can help you feel better.

We know not everyone will feel comfortable talking to people they know about their depression. In fact, you might feel more comfortable talking to people who don't know you so well. You could try joining an online forum - our online community is there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for you to chat with other people with lung conditions, about whatever's on your mind. Got to www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/web-community. You could also speak to your GP or another health care professional about how you're feeling.

Joining a support group is a great way to meet people locally who are going through similar things and can share advice. Go to www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathe-easy

If you don't feel up to seeing people in person, or aren't able to, send a text or email to keep in touch with friends and family.

Look after yourself

Taking the time to look after yourself can make you feel better. You should try to:

- **Eat well.** Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet, even if you don't feel like eating. You could try eating small meals more often rather than three big meals. This can be much more comfortable for people with a lung condition - www.blf.org.uk/eating-well
- **Avoid alcohol.** While it might be tempting to drink to cope with how you're feeling, drinking too much is likely to make your depression symptoms worse. Reducing how much you drink – or avoiding drinking altogether - may help you manage your symptoms and feel better.
- **Get good sleep.** This will help to improve your mood and boost your energy levels. Have a look at Mind's tips and ideas to help you have a good night sleep at www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/tips-to-improve-your-sleep
- **Look after your hygiene.** This might not feel like a priority when you're experiencing depression, but small things like taking a shower or getting properly dressed can make a big difference to how you feel.

Notice what helps your mood

Make a list of activities, people and places that make you feel happy or feel good.

Try to do something on the list you enjoy. You could:

- arrange to meet a friend
- phone someone you haven't seen for a while
- cook a simple meal
- watch your favourite film or TV show
- spend time in the garden or in your local park.

Starting a new hobby can also be a good way to meet people, focus your mind and have some fun. Trying something new, like learning a new skill or trying new food can help boost your mood and break unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaviour.

Treat yourself

When you're feeling down, it can be hard to feel good about yourself. Commit to do at least one positive thing for yourself every day.

This could be:

- taking the time for a long bath
- reading your favourite book
- doing a crossword or sudoku puzzle.

Do you feel best at lunchtime, first thing or are you a night owl? Try to plan something then.

Keep a mood diary

This can help you keep track of changes in your mood. It can also help you notice if any activities, people or places make you feel better or worse.

You could use our record of your mood form (PDF, 161KB) - www.blf.org.uk/sites/default/files/record_your_mood_diary.pdf

Get out in nature

Spending time outside has been found to help with mental health problems, including depression. Being outside in natural light can also be helpful if you experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD) - www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad/about-sad

We know not everyone will be able to easily spend time outdoors. For example, you might not have access to a garden, you might feel unmotivated to go outside or your lung condition might make it difficult to get outside easily. Take small steps to try and increase the amount of time you spend outside.

You can still reap the benefits of being outside by increasing the amount of nature in your everyday life. This could include growing a houseplant, planting vegetables, or listening to natural sounds like the ocean or rainfall.

Read more about how nature benefits our mental health on the Mind website at www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health

Challenge your thinking

How we think affects the way we feel. At times, we develop unhelpful thinking patterns which can lead to depression. These are sometimes called automatic thoughts, as you don't plan to have them. For example, you may find yourself catastrophising (thinking things are worse than they are), predicting the future or discounting the positive things. If you notice you are thinking negatively or have developed unhelpful thinking patterns, you should discuss this with your doctor or nurse. Challenging negative thinking plays a big part in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

The Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust has useful online resources to help with different mental health problems. Go to web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp

What treatment can I get for depression?

We all have times when we feel low. But if your feelings don't go away and are interfering with your life, it could be a sign you're experiencing depression.

When should I seek treatment for depression?

It's important to seek help from your GP or health care professional if you think you may be depressed. It's particularly important to seek help if:

- you have symptoms of depression that aren't improving
- your mood is affecting your work, other interests and relationships
- you have thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

It might be difficult to imagine how treatment will help. But the sooner you seek help, the sooner you'll feel better.

There aren't any physical tests for depression. The main way a health care professional can tell if you are depressed is by asking you questions about how the way you're feeling is affecting you mentally and physically.

If you need help for a mental health crisis or emergency, you should seek immediate advice. Help and support is available right now.

There are helplines you can call, or, if you don't want to talk to someone on the phone, text lines you can message. The NHS website has a page on help for suicidal thoughts, which includes a list of places you can get immediate help (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/help-for-suicidal-thoughts)

If you or a loved one needs immediate help, call 999 or visit your local A&E. A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one. You will not be wasting anyone's time.

How to assess how you've been feeling lately

Before you go to see your health care professional, it may help to think about these questions. Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

- feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
- not being able to stop or control worrying
- little interest or pleasure in doing things
- feeling down, depressed, or hopeless

You should think about if these problems have been affecting you:

- not at all
- for several days
- for more than half the days
- nearly every day

Make a note of your answers and take them with you to discuss with your health care professional.

It can be hard to admit or to recognise if you're feeling low or anxious. The NHS Choices mood self-assessment tool (www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/depression-anxiety-self-assessment-quiz) can help you better understand how you've been feeling recently. And once you've completed the questionnaire, it will point you in the right direction for support and advice tailored for you.

What treatment can I get for depression?

The sort of treatment you're offered will depend on how much your symptoms are affecting you and what sort of treatment you find helps you.

Your health care professional may offer you:

- pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) or another group exercise class. PR is an important form of treatment for people living with a long-term lung condition, as it helps you become more active and understand your condition better. Research has shown PR improves not only your fitness, but your mental wellbeing as well. Ask to be referred to a course by your health care professional.
- peer group support like a BLF support group - www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathe-easy

- talking treatment, like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- an antidepressant medication

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

CBT is based on the idea that the way we feel is affected by our physical symptoms, thoughts and beliefs and how we behave.

People with depression tend to have negative thoughts, which can lead to negative behaviour. For example:

“I’m a failure” - I stop doing things that I used to enjoy

“It’s hopeless” - I stop trying to do anything to make things better

This turns into a vicious cycle.



CBT aims to break this cycle. It encourages people to think about their problems and find ways to tackle them. It looks at their thoughts and what they are doing (their behaviour) to identify vicious cycles that may have developed. This helps them to identify unhelpful thinking patterns or behaviour and develop ways to manage the difficulties they may be experiencing.

Your health care professional may offer you CBT on your own or with a group of other people. These sessions may happen over six- eight weeks, or longer. Your health care professional should support you and review your progress.

You may be given an online course, a book or self-help manual, to work through. A health care professional will provide support and check progress either face-to-face or by phone. It’s usually about six sessions over about 12 weeks.

You can read more about CBT on the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

ACT is a form of therapy that uses techniques such as mindfulness and acceptance to help you through difficulties. Using ACT, therapists aim to change how you experience negative thoughts and feelings. You are taught methods to reduce the impact of these thoughts, so that if they reoccur you don't experience them in the same negative way. ACT therapy aims help you identify what is important in your life (these are called values) and commit to actions that are connected to your values. There is still limited evidence supporting the use of new therapies such as ACT, but many therapists are already using these techniques to help their patients.

Medication for depression

You may be offered a medication called an antidepressant as well as a talking treatment.

Your health care professional should discuss which antidepressant is most suitable for you. They should take into account your long-term condition and any potential side effects the drugs may have. Some antidepressants cannot be taken alongside certain medication. Your doctor should talk through the risks and benefits of particular types and monitor you carefully.

You should usually be offered a type of antidepressant called a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor or SSRI. Ones called citalopram and sertraline are less likely to affect any other medication you are taking.

Antidepressants do not start to work immediately - you won't feel the benefits as soon as you start taking them. Doctors tend to start people on low doses.

If you don't notice a difference to your mood in four weeks, your doctor may consider increasing the dose a little bit or changing you to another medication.

Getting the right antidepressant and the right dose can take a bit of experimentation - be patient. You should discuss any side effects with your doctor. It's also important you continue to try and manage your depression, for example by being as active as you can. Anti-depressants alone are not the answer.

More information and support

Places to get immediate help

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Whatever you're going through, you can call Samaritans anytime, from any phone for free. Call 116 123

Shout Crisis text line

giveusashout.org

For support in a crisis text 'Shout' to 85258. You can text any time, day or night.

NHS urgent mental health helpline

www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

24-hour advice and support, for you or someone you care for. This service is for people living in England only.

If you or a loved one needs immediate help, call 999 or visit your local A&E. A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one. You will not be wasting anyone's time.

Organisations offering information and support

For a complete list of mental health charities, organisations and support groups across the UK, take a look at this list on the NHS website - www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/charity-and-voluntary-services/get-help-from-mental-health-helplines

NHS – Mental health and wellbeing

www.nhs.uk/mental-health

NHS information on mental health and wellbeing. It includes a mood self-assessment resource that can help you understand how you've been feeling and what you can do about it.

Mind

www.mind.org.uk

Information and support on mental health problems, including advice on how to manage them. Mind also has advice for supporting someone living with a mental health problem.

Infoline open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. Call **0300 123 3393**

Rethink Mental Illness

www.rethink.org

Provides advice on living with a mental illness, including rights, benefits and general information.

Helpline open 9:30am – 4pm Monday to Friday. Call **0300 5000 927**

Mental Health Foundation

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Charity specialising in research and policy development, with a focus on preventing mental health problems.

No Panic

nopanic.org.uk

Offers advice, support, recovery programs and help for people living with phobias, OCD and any other anxiety-based disorders.

Helpline open 10am – 10pm every day of the year. Call **0300 7729844**

Relate

www.relate.org.uk

Provides relationship support, through counselling, mediation and workshops.

Find your nearest Relate for more information about what's available to you - www.relate.org.uk/find-your-nearest-relate

AnxietyUK

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Information and support for people living with anxiety. Become a member to gain access to a range of support and get immediate therapy on demand.

Helpline: **03444 775 774**

The Silver Line

www.thesilverline.org.uk

Confidential, free helpline for older people open every day and night of the year. It offers conversation and friendship, provides information and advice and can refer people on to receive regular friendship calls.

Helpline: **0800 4 70 80 90**

Action Mental Health

www.amh.org.uk

Works to improve people's mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland.

Hafal

hafal.org

Works in Wales with people recovering from serious mental illness and their families

Platform

platform.org

Works with people in Wales who are experiencing challenges with their mental health.

SAMH

www.samh.org.uk

The Scottish association for mental health operates services across communities in Scotland.

Online community support

BLF web community

www.blf.org.uk/web-community

Our web community is here whenever you need it – whether you’ve just been diagnosed or are dealing with a long-term condition, and whether you have a lung disease yourself or care for someone who does.

Side by Side

sidebyside.mind.org.uk

Connect with others and share how you’re feeling in a safe online space. This service is run by Mind, the mental health charity.

Phone apps to help you manage your mental wellbeing

Search the NHS apps library for a full list of mental health apps. Go to www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health

Headspace

www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app

Guided meditation and mindfulness.

Calm

www.calm.com/breathe

Mindfulness app to help reduce anxiety, sleep better and reduce stress.

Books to help you understand and manage mental health

There are lots of books available to help you understand and manage your mental wellbeing, so it’s worth doing a search online to find books that are of interest to you. Most bookshops now have a section on mental health that would be worth looking at.

Reading Well for mental health has collated a list of books that can help you understand your mental health better. All Reading Well books are recommended by health experts, as well as people with lived experience of the conditions. Go to reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/mental-health

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: **03000 030 555**

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

Code: BK115 **Version:** 2

blf.org.uk/mental-health

Last medically reviewed: March 2021

Due for medical review: March 2024

We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **blf.org.uk**