

Psychological Treatments

Treatment for depression, anxiety disorders and other mental illnesses can include psychological treatments, medication, support in the community, or a combination of these.

This Factsheet answers commonly-asked questions about psychological treatments.

How do psychological treatments help?

Psychological treatments help by giving an opportunity to talk to a specially-trained health professional in order to understand your symptoms, and to help you adapt how you feel, think and act in response to them.

What do we know about psychological treatments?

- ④ *You play a role in the therapy yourself*
Psychological treatments help you to understand why you feel, think and act in ways which are distressing and affect your life, and to work towards changing these. This can be challenging but it means you play an important part in your own therapy, and this in itself is empowering.
- ④ *Real change takes time to happen*
Psychological treatments do not work quickly, but over a period of months will help you to learn new ways of thinking, behaving and even feeling. You may notice, for example, that you are better prepared to handle things that used to worry you or get you down. Eventually you may find the whole way you think of yourself and the way you perceive and respond to the world changes for the better.
- ④ *Sometimes they work best combined with other treatments*
Psychological treatments are often effective on their own for people with depression and anxiety disorders. Sometimes it is also useful to combine them with other treatments such as medication. For people, with psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, for example, ongoing rehabilitation, accommodation and employment support are often needed as well as medication.

What psychological treatments are there?

There are many types of psychological treatment which are proven to be effective. These may be provided individually, as part of a group, as a couple or even as a whole family – depending on the nature of the problem. Some common psychological treatments are:

- ④ *Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)*
CBT helps people discover how their feelings, thoughts and behaviour can get stuck in unhelpful patterns. They are encouraged to try new, more positive ways of thinking and acting. Therapy usually includes tasks to try between sessions. CBT is a well-established treatment for depression and most anxiety disorders. It can also be an effective part of treatment for other conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.
- ④ *Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT)*
IPT looks at the way someone has related to significant people in their life, and how this may have affected other relationships and how they feel, think and act generally. It then looks at finding more positive ways of interacting with others. IPT can be especially effective in treating depression and anxiety disorders
- ④ *Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT)*
DBT is a form of treatment specifically for people with borderline personality disorder (BPD). DBT is based on an understanding that a key problem for people with BPD is extreme difficulty in handling emotions, and the distress associated with this. DBT helps people learn to handle their emotions better and re-learn the way they typically respond to situations and other people. DBT generally combines individual and group therapy
- ④ *Family interventions*
These treatments aim to support families and other carers by fostering calm and constructive family relationships where a member of the family has a psychotic illness such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Family intervention sessions typically focus on education about mental illness, solving of problems encountered as a result of the illness, and improving communication and relationships where these are strained or stressful. Family interventions can reduce relapse rates for people with psychotic illness while also supporting everyone involved.

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Psychological treatments vary in the length of time they take to work. The benefits of psychological treatments often happen at a different rate for different individuals.

How long do they take to work?

Psychological treatments vary in the length of time they take to work, depending on the particular treatment and on the individual's needs. Sessions usually last between 45 and 90 minutes. Most people receive up to ten sessions, with some attending further sessions if required.

Who provides psychological treatments?

General practitioners (GPs)

A GP is always the best place to start if concerned about your physical or mental health. As well as making an assessment and diagnosis, a GP can prescribe a Mental Health Care Plan, which may include referral for psychological treatment to a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional.

With a referral from a GP, the cost of this treatment is largely covered by Medicare. Health professionals at Community Mental Health Services and public hospitals do not charge fees.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are medically-qualified doctors who specialise in the study and treatment of mental illness. They can therefore prescribe medication as well as provide psychological treatments.

Psychologists

A psychologist is a health professional trained to provide treatments to people with emotional and mental health problems.

Other mental health professionals

Other mental health professionals may also be able to provide psychological treatments – for example, social workers and occupational therapists who have received specialised training.

How do I find the best help?

Use these tips to find and get the best from psychological treatments.

Word of mouth

As well as your GP, ask other health professionals, local pharmacists or trusted family and friends about providers of psychological treatments they would recommend.

Australian Psychological Society (APS)

The APS has a referral service that gives contact details of privately-practising psychologists in your area who work with particular mental health problems.

Ask questions

It's important to be engaged as much as possible yourself in the psychological treatment. When making an appointment, or during an early session, ask the provider what the goals of treatment are and what it will involve.

Speak out

The more you speak out and are frank with yourself as well as with the person providing the treatment, the more successful it is likely to be.

If you feel concerned, confused or uncomfortable with the treatment, let the provider know, so they can work with you to address the reasons for these feelings. If you feel that they are not the right person to help you, then explain this and ask for another referral. A good provider of psychological treatment will want what is best for you and will not hesitate to refer you to someone more appropriate.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. For more information related to this topic see:

SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments

Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.

SANE Guide to Healthy Living

Information and tips on developing a lifestyle that is physically as well as mentally healthy, as well as where to find support to do this.

Use the Order Form which came with this Factsheet or visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org