

Mental health and me

A guide to help boost
your wellbeing



About us

Good Thinking is supported by the NHS and London borough councils. We provide free, 24/7, digital support to Londoners seeking mental health advice and help regardless of where they are on their journey. We offer round-the-clock support and self-care options that are easy to access and simple to navigate.

Our mission

We support individuals to look after their mental wellbeing in a way that works best for them. We encourage everyone to be proactive about their mental health and we provide tools and guidance to support this.

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Everyone has mental health just like everyone has physical health – and it's really important that you look after both.

It can be difficult to talk openly about your mental health and to feel comfortable seeking support though. So, Good Thinking has worked with Dr Imrana Siddiqui, a GP and Clinical Lead for Mental Health in North East London, to create this guide, which aims to help you understand more about mental wellbeing and the importance of self-care and to reassure you that it's OK to ask for help.



Wherever you are on your journey to good mental health, we hope you find this guide helpful and that it gives you the confidence to support your mental health better.

This guide has been written for Londoners of all cultures, faiths and religions but if you would like faith-based resources, we recommend the following:

Fact check

Have you been discouraged from seeking help because of things you've read or heard from others in your community? Here, we address some of the misconceptions surrounding mental health through a faith lens.

Five ways to good mental wellbeing

This series of guides has been created through collaboration with members of the Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu communities in London. They align NHS mental wellbeing advice with the beliefs and teachings of these faiths.

Anxiety



What is anxiety?

Anxiety can be described as “a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe”. Whilst it’s natural to feel anxious or scared in certain situations and at certain times in your life, it can sometimes be difficult to control your feelings and behaviour. Over time, the anxiety can become more serious.

What causes it?

There are lots of reasons you might experience anxiety, such as:

- Getting nervous about meeting new people
- Feeling anxious about a work deadline
- Having a physical health condition that worries you

Often, there isn’t one specific reason – it’s common to not be able to work out why you are feeling this way.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The symptoms of anxiety vary from person to person and can be both physical and psychological. They include:

- Fast heartbeat
- Not sleeping properly
- Feeling shaky or dizzy
- Aches and pains (e.g. headaches and tummy aches)
- Changes in appetite
- Feeling irritable
- Panic attacks

What can I do about it?

The symptoms of anxiety can be very distressing and might interfere with your daily life. The good news is that there is support available.

Use the [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies \(IAPT\) service finder](#) to get details of your nearest NHS Talking Therapy service.

Speak to your GP who might be able to refer you to a specialist counselling service.

If you need urgent support, contact your [local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline](#).

How can Good Thinking help me?

- ✓ Use Good Thinking’s [free clinically-validated self-assessment tool](#) to help you understand your anxiety. You’ll be asked questions that a GP or psychologist would ask and it only takes 20 minutes to complete. You’ll then receive recommendations for resources to help you.
- ✓ Access various [NHS-approved wellbeing apps](#), which are free for Good Thinking users. They include Be Mindful, tomo and Meditainment.
- ✓ Learn more about managing your symptoms in Good Thinking’s [advice about anxiety](#) and the [Centre for Clinical Interventions anxiety workbook](#).



Stress

What is stress?

When faced with pressure or a sense of threat, your body's natural reaction is to release hormones that prepare your body to escape the threat and protect yourself (often called the 'fight or flight' response). This feeling of stress happens to everyone and can even be helpful in certain situations.

What causes it?

You might feel stressed:

- Ahead of an important exam or meeting or when you're stuck in traffic (this is called acute or short-term stress).
- Due to ongoing emotional pressure from e.g. a busy job, an unhappy family situation or money worries (this is called chronic or long-term stress).

What are the signs and symptoms?

Stress can affect both the body and mind, with common symptoms including:

- Fast heartbeat
- Raised blood pressure
- Headache, back pain, jaw ache or tight neck/shoulders
- Feeling irritable or hostile towards others
- Eating too much or too little
- Becoming forgetful

What can I do about it?

Occasional moderate stress tends not to cause mental health problems but if you often feel stressed and it's affecting the way you behave towards others, there is support available.

If you need urgent support, contact your [local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline](#).

Speak to your GP who might be able to refer you to a specialist counselling service.

Use the [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies \(IAPT\)](#) service finder to get details of your nearest NHS Talking Therapy service.

How can Good Thinking help me?

- ✓ Use Good Thinking's free [self-assessment tool](#) to check your stress anonymously – it only takes 20 minutes to complete online and you'll receive suggestions for what might be stressing you and recommendations for resources to help you reduce your stress.
- ✓ Access various [NHS-approved wellbeing apps](#), which are free for Good Thinking users. They include Be Mindful, My Possible Self and tomo.
- ✓ Learn more about managing your symptoms in Good Thinking's [advice about stress](#) and the Centre for Clinical Interventions [mindfulness workbook](#).



Low mood

What is low mood?

Some things in life can have a negative effect on your mood. But if your low mood lasts a long time (e.g. more than two weeks) and makes everything feel more difficult, you might have a mood disorder, such as depression.

What causes it?

Low mood can be the result of a distressing event or major life change, such as:

- Relationship problems
- Illness (yourself or a family member)
- Losing your job

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms of low mood and depression depend on each individual but they might include:

- Feeling tearful, frustrated or empty
- Aches and pains (e.g. headaches and tummy aches)
- Finding it hard to get out of bed in the morning or having trouble sleeping
- No longer enjoying the social activities and hobbies that you used to enjoy
- Feeling unusually tired and having trouble sleeping
- Gaining or losing weight

What can I do about it?

There are lots of things you can do to boost your mood and feel stronger. Try to talk to someone about how you're feeling, stay physically active and get enough sleep. If your low mood has lasted more than two weeks, there is support available.

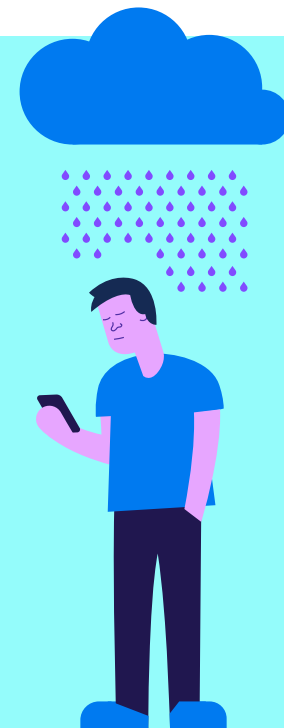
Speak to your GP who might be able to refer you to a specialist counselling service.

Use the [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies \(IAPT\) service finder](#) to get details of your nearest NHS Talking Therapy service.

If you need urgent support, contact your [local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline](#).

How can Good Thinking help me?

- ✓ Use Good Thinking's free [self-assessment tool](#) to check your mood anonymously – it only takes 20 minutes to complete online and you'll receive recommendations for resources to help you boost your mood.
- ✓ Access various [NHS-approved wellbeing apps](#), which are free for Good Thinking users. They include Be Mindful, My Possible Self and tomo.
- ✓ Learn more about managing your symptoms in Good Thinking's [advice about low mood](#) and the Centre for Clinical Interventions [depression workbook](#).



Sleep problems

What kinds of sleep problems are there?

Around a third of adults have trouble sleeping at some point in their lives. This might include finding it hard to fall asleep, waking up in the night or feeling tired and irritable during the day.

What causes these problems?

Sleep problems can occur due to:

- Illness, stress or bereavement
- Doing shift work or having caring responsibilities
- Having a disorder that regularly disrupts your sleep (e.g. sleep apnoea)
- Your environment not aiding sleep (e.g. your bedroom is too bright or warm)

What are the signs and symptoms?

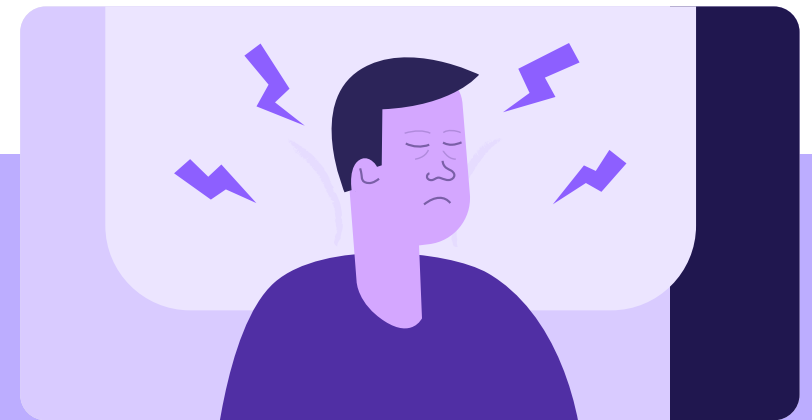
Sleep disorders can affect your body and mind in different ways. They can be divided into the three categories below:

- Lack of sleep (e.g. having trouble getting to sleep, waking in the night, feeling tired)
- Disturbed sleep (because of e.g. nightmares, chronic pain, sleepwalking)
- Excessive sleep (e.g. feeling very sleepy or suddenly falling asleep during the day)

What can I do about this?

Getting a good night's sleep has many benefits for your health and wellbeing – it helps to lower stress, improve concentration and reduce the risk of many medical conditions, including heart disease and diabetes.

If you're having trouble sleeping, speak to your GP and get a proper diagnosis. It's important to note that medication doesn't usually help with sleep problems and can lead to other problems in the long term.



How can Good Thinking help me?

- ✓ Use Good Thinking's free [self-assessment tool](#) to check your sleep problems anonymously – it only takes 20 minutes to complete online and you'll receive recommendations for resources that will help you to get more sleep.
- ✓ Access various [NHS-approved wellbeing apps](#), which are free for Good Thinking users. They include Be Mindful, My Possible Self and tomo.
- ✓ Learn more about managing your symptoms in Good Thinking's [sleep workbook](#) and the Centre for Clinical Interventions [sleep workbook](#).

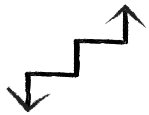
Other conditions



Psychosomatic disorders

Some people struggle with persistent physical symptoms for which no medical cause can be found. In some cases, it may be the way their body is expressing stress, low mood or anxiety. After being checked by their GP, the GP might recommend

different types of support, including talking therapy and even medication in some situations.



Bipolar disorder

People with this condition can experience episodes of depression (feeling very low) and mania (feeling very high). These highs and lows can have a negative impact on daily life but they can be treated with medicine and psychological therapies.



Psychosis

When people lose some contact with reality (because of e.g. another mental health condition, stress or substance misuse), this is known as psychosis. The main symptoms are unusual experiences and thinking, including hallucinations

(e.g. hearing voices) and delusions (e.g. believing someone wants to harm them). It can be a very distressing condition and requires immediate support – either through a mental health team or GP or, if the person is at risk of harming themselves or others, via a crisis line, 999 or A&E. Treatments include antipsychotic medicine and psychological therapies.



Disordered eating

If someone experiences disordered eating, it often means they eat very little or eat something more than they need. GPs are able to offer support for disordered eating and might be able to make a referral to a therapist. Specialist charities (e.g

Beat) can also provide invaluable support for disordered eating as well as for eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia.



Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD describes a condition where someone has obsessive thoughts (e.g. worrying about leaving the gas on or if they have locked their front door) and compulsive behaviours (e.g. washing hands a lot and checking things). People with OCD are often

embarrassed to seek help but, if they do, they might be recommended cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or medicine (anti-depressant). OCD UK and other charities are also available for support.



Trauma

If someone is involved in a car accident, act of violence or another traumatic event, they might experience short-term effects, such as anger, anxiety, fatigue and nightmares. This is a normal response to what has happened and the support

of family and friends should help to reduce these effects over time. In some cases, however, the distress lasts longer and might require the support of a GP or other healthcare professional.

How to support someone you know

Spotting the signs of mental ill health

It can be difficult to know if a relative, friend or someone else in your community has a mental health condition but there are a few things you can look out for:

- ? Are they particularly sad, worried or overwhelmed?
- ? Are they often tired or lacking energy?
- ? Do they find it hard to control their emotions (e.g. are they often irritable, tearful or extremely happy or excited)?
- ? Are they sleeping more or less than usual?
- ? Are they experiencing physical symptoms regularly (e.g. headaches and tummy aches)?

If changes in your loved one's emotions and behaviour start to affect how they live – and change what they can do – they may need some professional support. If they choose to confide in you, the most important thing you can do is show them that you care for them.

Tips for providing support

Asking for help takes courage, especially if mental health problems are stigmatised within a particular community. That's why it's so important to check in with people on a regular basis and see how they are – the more open everyone can be about their feelings, the better.

If someone tells you they are struggling with their mental health, your acceptance and compassion can make a big difference. You might want to do the following:

- ✓ Reassure them that you're there for them
- ✓ Be patient (e.g. don't force them to go to their GP if they aren't ready)
- ✓ Behave the way you always have – call, text, visit and do rewarding activities together
- ✓ Offer practical help, such as shopping for groceries
- ✓ Encourage them to incorporate something from the [Five ways to good mental wellbeing](#) in their daily life
- ✓ Help them to make a crisis or emergency plan (you can find guidance on how to do this on the [Mind website](#))

Directing people to support organisations

If your support doesn't seem to be having much impact, don't worry – it's not your fault. Sometimes people need professional support. Fortunately, there is lots of help available if someone is concerned about their mental health. Perhaps you could help them to:

- ✓ Make an appointment with their GP
- ✓ Contact a mental health charity via a phone helpline or online forum (e.g. [Mind](#) or [Samaritans](#))
- ✓ Use [Good Thinking's self-assessment tool](#) (you can complete it for someone else)
- ✓ Make the most of Good Thinking's apps, workbooks and other resources, which are free for Londoners
- ✓ If your relative or friend is very distressed, call their local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline, NHS 111 or 999



Looking after yourself

If you're supporting someone with a mental health condition – especially if you've taken on regular caring responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning – don't forget to look after yourself too. We recommend that you:

- ✓ Set some boundaries so that they know what to expect
- ✓ Try to share your responsibilities with others so things don't become overwhelming
- ✓ Take regular breaks and try to get a good night's sleep
- ✓ Make sure you talk openly with others about how you're feeling



How to support young people

If your child is experiencing anxiety, stress, disordered eating or another mental health concern, Good Thinking provides a range of advice and resources to help you support them on our [Young People hub](#). This includes the free Combined Minds app, which helps families and friends to support young people with their mental wellbeing, as well as free apps for under-18s (e.g. Move Mood).



Good Thinking resources

Good Thinking provides a range of free resources that we would encourage you to access online and share with people you know. These include:

Blogs

Find out how other Londoners have coped with the COVID-19 pandemic – from a doctor to a Year 11 student, a football club director to a young dad.



'How to' guides

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we developed a series of guides to help Londoners cope with specific concerns, such as overcoming fears about the easing of lockdown and coping with bereavement.

Free apps

Good Thinking works with leading app providers to offer NHS-approved wellbeing apps for free to its users. Our most popular apps include Be Mindful, My Possible Self and tomo.



Podcasts

Get insights and personal stories from experts and people who know how you are feeling because they've been there. They are a great way to understand more about what can help.



Self-assessment

If you're feeling anxious, down, stressed or having trouble sleeping, the Good Thinking self-assessment tool will provide you with a guiding diagnosis, helpful resources and, if necessary, relevant treatment options – and it only takes 20 minutes to complete.

Workbooks

If you'd prefer more in-depth advice, as well as checklists and other tools, check out the workbooks from the Centre for Clinical Interventions and our own Good Thinking workbooks.



Videos

Short videos by the Speakers Collective and other organisations and individuals show how others have coped with the COVID-19 pandemic and also provide personal insights on specific mental health topics.

Support organisations

Click the links below to find out more:

[Beat](#)

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Mind](#)

[NHS](#)

[OCD UK](#)

[Samaritans](#)

[Shout](#)

[The Mix](#)

[YoungMinds](#)

