

Easy Read

Guide to good mental health

An easy read guide by Learning Disability Wales



Learning Disability Wales
Anabledd Dysgu Cymru

How to use this document



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If you need further support with your mental health, please see the organisations listed on page 28.



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What is mental health?



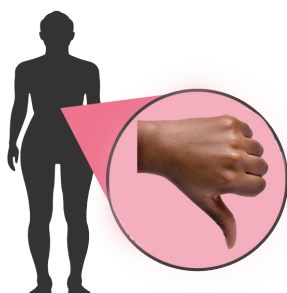
Mental health is about our emotions, feelings, and thoughts.



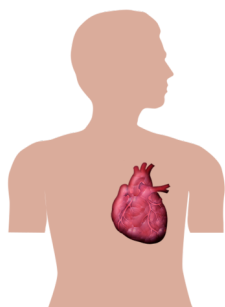
Sometimes people feel sad or worried, and this is normal.



But when people feel like this often, it may be a sign of a mental health issue.



Mental health issues can affect your body too.



For example, when people worry a lot, they may notice their heart beats faster. Or they feel sick.



Everyone needs to look after their mental health.



This guide is to help people understand more about mental health.



And learn how to take care of it.

What is a mental illness?



If someone has a lot of problems with their mental health, they may go and see their doctor.



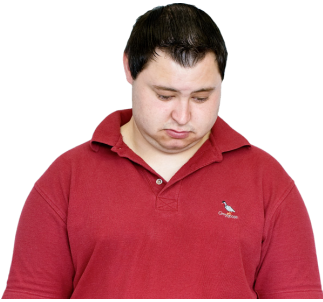
The doctor may say they have a mental illness. Or a mental health issue. They are the same thing.



There are a lot of different types of mental health issues. And people are affected in many ways.



The most common ones are **depression** and **anxiety**. Many people suffer from these conditions. In this guide we are just going to focus on these 2 issues.



Depression is the most common type of mental health issue.



People with depression often have a low mood that lasts for a long time.



But there are a lot of symptoms and everyone is different.

Some common symptoms of depression are:



- Having less energy

- Sleep problems. Some people sleep more and some sleep less



- Sadness that doesn't go away

- Problems focussing



- Not being able to enjoy doing the things you used to

- Not wanting to be around friends



- Going off food

- Thinking about hurting yourself or wanting to die



- Not feeling very good about yourself

- Aches and pains.



Anxiety is also a very common mental health issue.



People who suffer with depression often get anxiety too.



And people who suffer from anxiety often get depression.

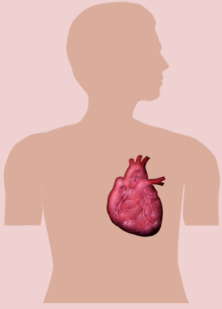


There are many different types of anxiety.



The main symptom of anxiety is when people feel worried for a lot of the time.

People can have different symptoms. But some common symptoms of anxiety are:



- Fast heartbeat



- Fast breathing

- Tense or tight muscles



- Feeling sick



- Trouble sleeping

- Sweating



- Finding it hard to concentrate.

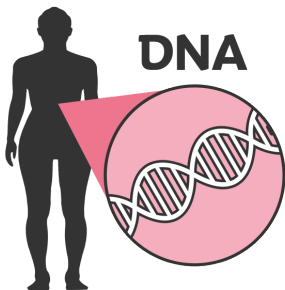
What causes mental health issues?



We are still learning about what causes mental health issues.



But we know that there are 2 main causes:



1. Our genes

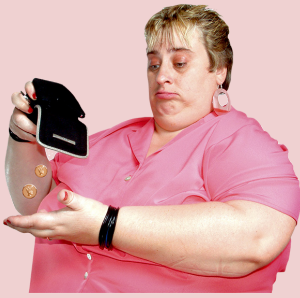
This means the way our body is made up makes us more likely to get a mental health issue.



2. Our lives

This means things that happen in our lives can affect our mental health. This second cause is very important. This is often called the **social causes**.

Some examples of the social causes of mental health issues are:



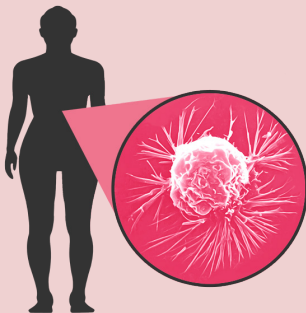
- If we are poor, we are more likely to get mental health issues.



- People who go through difficult times when they are growing up are more likely to get mental health issues.



- People who don't get the same chances in life to get a good job or learn are more likely to get mental health issues.



- People with other health issues are more likely to be affected.



- People with a learning disability are more likely to get mental health issues.

What to do if you think you have a mental health issue



If you think you are suffering from a mental health issue it is really important that you try and get help.



Think of a person who you trust that you can talk to.



Telling someone how you feel can be really helpful.



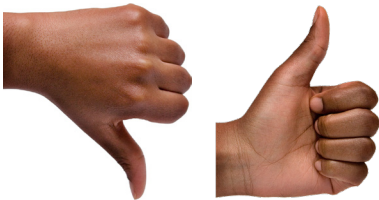
It is also important to go and see your doctor. They will ask you questions to find out if you have a mental health issue.

Treating mental health issues

1. Medication



Your doctor can give you medication to help with issues like depression and anxiety.



Some people find medication helpful and some don't.



Some people get side effects from medication but these often wear off.



It is important to ask your doctor questions about medication. And to think about whether it is right for you.

Medication is not the only way of treating mental health issues. Your doctor should give you other options too.

2. Talking therapies



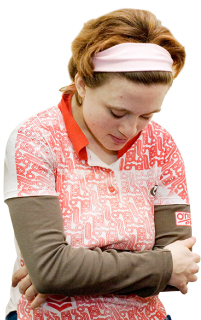
Your doctor can also refer you to someone for talking therapy.



This will be with someone who is trained to help you talk through your problems and help you find ways to feel better.



You don't just need to talk to a professional. Talking to friends and family can really help you to feel better too.



People with depression often shut themselves away and don't want to trouble other people with their problems.

If you are thinking of hurting yourself, please talk to someone. Difficult times do get better.



Talking can make a huge difference to how we feel. There is more information about people who can help at the end of the leaflet.



Talking about our feelings can help us to feel supported. It can help us know that other people understand. And care.



It is a good idea to think of people in your life who are good listeners. And who you trust.

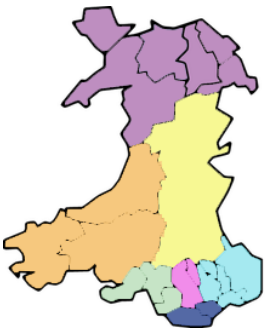


Remember, you are not alone. And many people feel this way sometimes.

3. Primary Mental Health Services



In Wales there are services that try to help people who are suffering from things like depression and anxiety.



They are run in every health area in Wales.



For example, some areas have classes to help you manage stress.



Ask your doctor what primary mental health services there are in your area.

How to look after your mental health and well-being



These are tips everyone can try to help stay well.

1. Exercise



Exercise is really good for your mental health. It can help improve your mood.



And can help you feel calmer.



It does not mean you have to go to a gym. Going outside for a walk can be very helpful.



Try to do a little bit of exercise everyday if you can. Even if you do it for a short time and make it a bit longer every day.



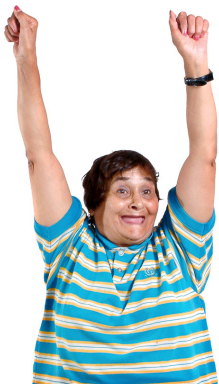
Some types of exercise help you feel calm and help you keep fit. For example, Yoga or Tai Chi.

2. Food



Eating a healthy diet can help your mental health. This means eating a diet with these foods:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Nuts
- Beans
- Cereals
- Grains
- Fish
- Good fats (for example olive oil).



Eating a lot of these kinds of foods regularly has been shown to reduce depression.



A poor diet has been shown to be bad for your mental health. A poor diet means eating a lot of these foods:

- Food high in fat
- White bread
- Cakes
- Desserts
- Pizza
- Processed food. For example, 'ready meals'



The **NHS Eatwell Guide** can tell you more about healthy eating.



The website address is: [nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide)

3. Breathing exercises



When people are worried, they often find they breathe a lot faster.



And when people are depressed they often think a lot of sad thoughts.



Breathing exercises can help slow our breathing down and help us to feel calmer.

There are lots of different breathing exercises to try. Here is one example:



- Sit down on a chair if you can.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose.



- Hold your breath for a couple of seconds.



- Then slowly breath out through your mouth.
- Repeat until you start to feel calmer.

4. Mindfulness



Mindfulness is about using breathing in a slightly different way.



Mindfulness is about helping us to be still and focus our attention on this moment.



People with depression or anxiety often worry about the future or think about the past too much.



With mindfulness we learn how to focus on what is happening right now. This can help us feel calmer and happier.



Here is a video about a group of people with learning disabilities in England, who went on a Mindfulness course:

[.youtube.com/watch?v=v1fl7gqKYRQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1fl7gqKYRQ)



Mindfulness isn't right for everyone. But a lot of people find it very helpful.

5. Hobbies and interests



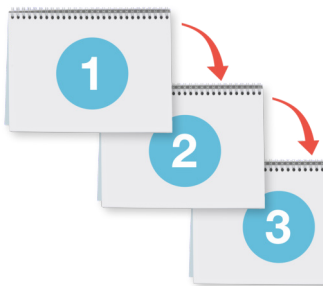
When someone is depressed they often don't feel like doing the things they used to.



When people are anxious they often find it difficult to relax. So quite often, people stop doing the things they used to enjoy. Or they stop finding new hobbies.



But doing things you enjoy is a good way to take your mind off things. And can help you feel happier.



Sometimes it is helpful to take small steps to help you get back into doing the things you used to enjoy.



For example if you used to enjoy cooking you could think about making something very simple and not put too much pressure on yourself.



There is a very helpful video about depression on YouTube. A person called Matthew Johnston made it to help others. Here is the link:

[youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc&t=3s)

Further help



If you need more help, you can contact these organisations:

www.mind.org.uk

www.mentalhealthwales.net

www.samaritans.org

www.thecalmzone.net



If you need to talk to someone you can call the **Mental Health Helpline for Wales:**

Phone: 0800 132 737

Or text **help** to: 81066