

buzz

Manchester
Health & Wellbeing
Service



Long-Term Physical Health Conditions

A guide to your emotional
health and wellbeing



Produced by buzz Manchester Health & Wellbeing Service
in partnership with Manchester Primary Care Mental Health Team.
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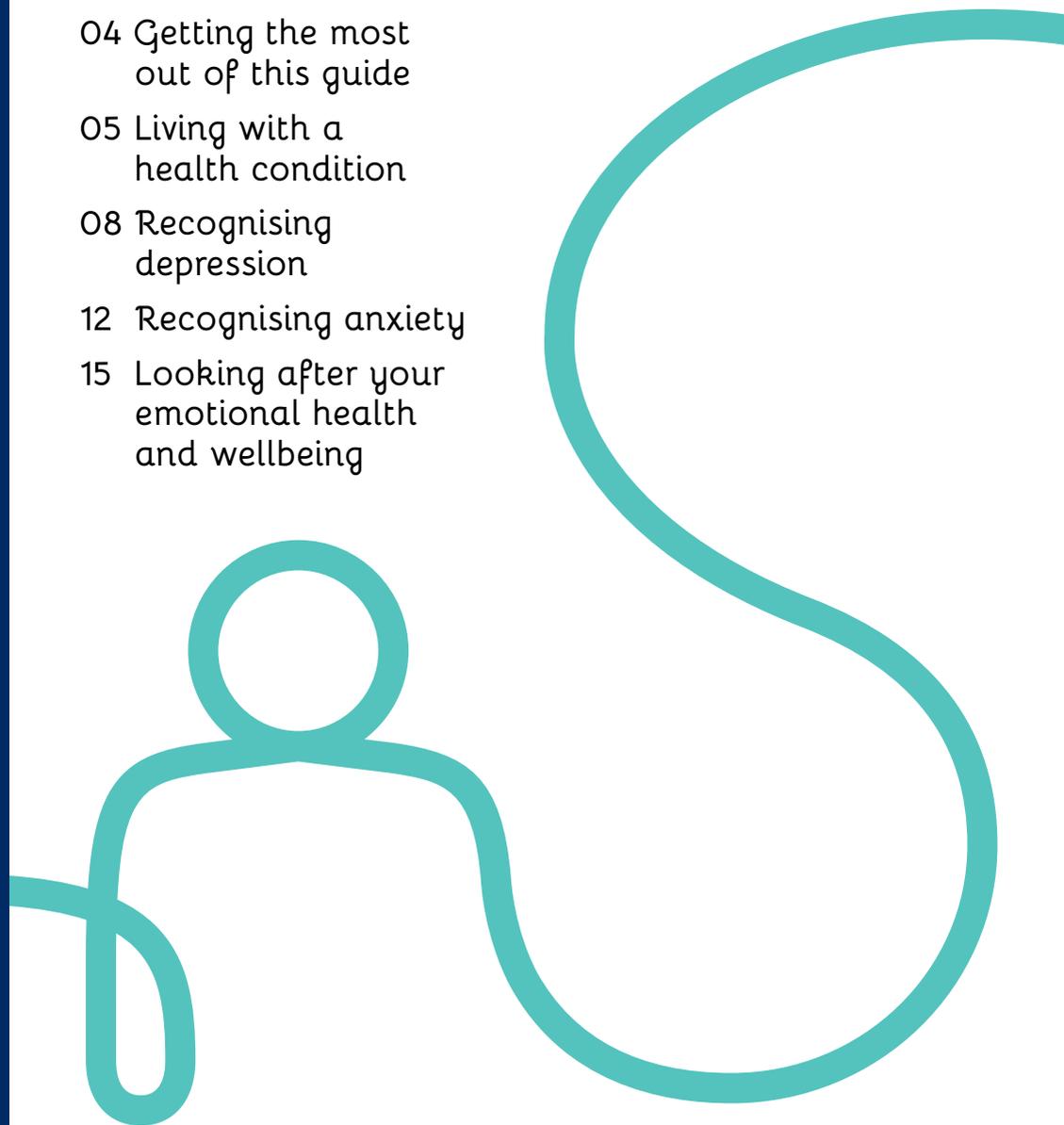
www.buzzmanchester.co.uk

This guide is one of a series about mental health and wellbeing by buzz Manchester Health & Wellbeing Service. You can find more guides at www.mhim.org.uk

'Long-Term Physical Health Conditions' gives advice on how to manage your emotional health and wellbeing if you are suffering from a long-term condition such as diabetes, heart disease or arthritis.

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Getting the most out of this guide

This guide will:

- Explain how your emotional and mental wellbeing can be affected when living with a long-term physical health condition
- Provide you with information about what sort of help and support is available locally to help you find the emotional support you need
- Help you to recognise depression and anxiety (the most common problems people experience)
- Provide you with practical steps you can take to help protect your psychological health and wellbeing and keep well
- Advise you on how you can help yourself feel better if you are experiencing difficulties

Living with a health condition

Our mind and body are strongly linked together and each one affects the other.

For many people being diagnosed with a physical health condition and living with it day to day can affect how you feel emotionally and how you cope with life's stresses. It could be hard to cope with the physical health condition if you feel down or stressed a lot of the time.

Certain physical health conditions and their treatments can cause changes to your mood and you may also have to adjust your daily routine which can take its toll on your mental wellbeing, making it more likely for you to suffer or possibly develop a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety.

Living with a long-term physical health condition can sometimes leave you feeling like you are riding on a roller coaster of emotions and feelings, with ups and downs along the way. Feeling afraid, sad, angry, guilty, annoyed or simply worn down are common reactions that people experience.

It can take some time to come to terms with being diagnosed with a health condition. We may want to ignore the fact that we have health problems, however coming to terms with it is important. Denial can have negative implications for recovery and future health and wellbeing. Adjusting to a new view of yourself and dealing with any restrictions the condition may bring can be difficult. It may reassure you to know that experiencing these feelings is quite common.

“Talking to someone who knows how it feels really helped me to believe I wasn’t alone.”

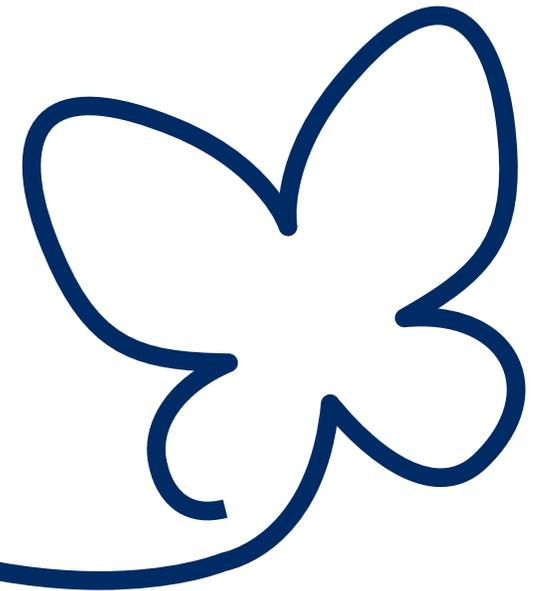
Many people think it’s normal to be depressed or anxious all the time when you have a physical health condition or as you get older.

This is not the case. It is important to tell someone if you are feeling this way because emotional problems can be misdiagnosed as some of the symptoms of depression and anxiety can be mistaken for a physical illness.

Help is available and problems can be overcome. It is even more important that you take care of your own emotional health to prevent problems occurring and get help if you think you need it.

Here are some common statements which you may identify with:

- ‘I can’t cope with the pain and the worry, everything is just getting on top of me’
- ‘I was doing okay until I had the heart attack now I feel my life is over’



Recognising depression

We can all get fed up and feel down sometimes. These feelings are more common when living with a long-term condition.

If you have felt low for more than two weeks and it is affecting your daily life you might be depressed and should seek help from a health professional.

Ask yourself these two questions:

Question one:

During the last month, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?

Question two:

During the last month, have you often been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?

A GP or another health professional may ask you some similar questions during an appointment. If you have answered yes to either or both of these questions you could possibly be depressed.

You will need to think about whether it is something you need or want help with.

Other symptoms to look out for if you are depressed are:

- Changes in your sleep pattern: either sleeping less or more
- Changes in your appetite: eating less or more
- Difficulty concentrating: on a favourite TV programme, book etc
- Have less energy than is usual and feeling like not doing anything
- Feeling bad about yourself and thinking you are worthless
- Feeling irritable with everyone and everything in your life
- Feeling weepy and crying for no reason
- Having frequent suicidal thoughts and feeling that life is not worth living

If you are depressed, anxious or stressed you may struggle to deal with your normal routine, such as:

- Attending appointments
- Remembering to take medications
- Keeping active
- Eating a healthy diet
- Having a healthy lifestyle
- Believing you can manage your condition

All of these tasks are important to help keep your physical health and quality of life in good shape. If you don't do them your health will get worse, so it is vital that you look out for problems and deal with them quickly.

“Looking after
your emotional
health will help
you feel better,
cope and
live better.”



Recognising anxiety

It is common to feel anxious, tense and fearful when living with a health condition.

You may be worrying about your condition and about the changes in lifestyle you may have to make. You may feel frightened about the future. If you are constantly worried, fearful or panicky and it is affecting your daily life you may need more help. Go to pages 18 and 19 of this guide for information on where you could find help.

Below are some symptoms of anxiety to look out for:

- Nervous, worried, frightened and panicky
- On edge, tense
- You feel that something bad is going to happen
- Can't concentrate
- You are constantly worrying about one or many things
- You are preoccupied and think the worst is going to happen
- You avoid situations/things that worry you
- You are irritable and short tempered
- Drink or smoke more
- Eat more or less than usual
- Don't sleep well
- Can't just sit and relax

You may get physical symptoms such as:

- A thumping, racing heart
- Difficulty breathing: shortness of breath, chest feeling tight
- Stomach churning (butterflies)
- Dizziness or light headedness
- Nausea
- Tingling or numbness in toes/fingers

These are just a few of the symptoms that can be caused by anxiety.

Sometimes anxiety can make the symptoms of your health condition worse e.g. breathlessness, so dealing with anxiety is very important for your overall health.

Depression, stress and anxiety are very common and are nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. You are not mad, lazy or weak. If you believe you are not coping, being honest about how you feel is often the first step to getting the help you need and to feeling better.

If you think you might be depressed or anxious then seek help now. Go to page 18 and 19 for organisations and websites that could help.

“By looking after yourself you will be able to deal with the ups and downs that life may throw at you.”

Looking after your emotional health and wellbeing

Looking after your emotional health is just as important as looking after your physical health but we often neglect it or don't know how to do it.

There is evidence that taking some simple steps can help protect and strengthen your mental health. It may help reduce the risk of developing depression, anxiety and stress.

Talk to someone you trust

Tell a health professional if you feel low or very anxious. Remember, they are there to help you deal with your emotional health as well as your physical health. Don't feel embarrassed or ashamed to discuss it. It is a common problem. Share your feelings with your family, friends or others who know how it feels to live with a condition. It helps to talk and can help you find ways of dealing with how you feel and live with your condition.

Distract yourself

Plan something to do each day. It is easy to stop doing things when you feel low. Doing a little each day can help. Even if you can't be bothered or don't enjoy anything at the moment, you may find that just doing things again gradually helps you feel better. Having a routine also helps keep you going.

Keep a diary

Try keeping a weekly diary noting down things you have achieved or enjoyed. It may help you think about the positive/good things in your life not just the negative.

Connect

Keep in touch with family and friends. Being with others helps us to feel less alone. If you have difficulties with mobility or if you feel unwell ask others to visit you or ring someone for a chat.

Live in the present

Make the most of today rather than thinking too much about the past before you were diagnosed or the future which you can't predict.

Looking after your emotional health and wellbeing

Do something you enjoy

If your condition limits the enjoyable things you can do, think of how you can overcome any obstacles. Think of what you can do rather than what you can't (being positive helps). If you can't do the gardening for an hour, could you do it for half an hour? You could find another hobby or interest to try. It is important to carry on doing things you enjoy because that's what makes life worthwhile.

Keep informed

Sometimes having unanswered questions (especially when you have just been diagnosed) can cause lots of worry. Don't be afraid to ask for information from a health professional. Get help with practical problems e.g. financial worries, living aids.

Pace yourself

It can be easy to over-do it on the days we feel better so make sure you balance activity with rest.

Stay positive

Look out for unhelpful 'negative' thoughts which are common when people are stressed, worried or low e.g. 'I can't get my diabetes under control, I'm a total failure'. If you spot this thinking ask yourself 'Am I being too hard on myself?' 'What would I say to friend if they talked like this?' Challenge your negative thoughts and think of more positive ones.

Take one thing at a time

Although things may seem hopeless at the moment, remind yourself that you can and will recover from depression or learn to manage anxiety. It just takes time.

Eating and drinking well

What we eat and drink can affect how we feel so ensure you eat a balanced diet. Alcohol is a depressant, too much can affect your mood and health. The guide 'Food and Mood' has more information. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Get physically active

Activity makes you feel better through the release of natural 'feel good' chemicals into your body. A little of this can mean a lot. (Always seek advice from your GP first before starting any exercise). The guide 'Physical Activity and Mood' has even more tips about getting started. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Watch out for stress

Learn and make time for relaxation – it can help you deal with the physical and emotional effects of stress and anxiety and to cope better with life. Try to remove or reduce pressures in your life if you can. Make relaxation part of your daily routine e.g. have a bath, listen to music, try relaxation exercises, have a massage. Find out what type works best for you. Read the guide 'From Distress to De-stress' for more information. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Sleep well

Lack of sleep reduces our ability to handle stress and deal with life. You can use relaxation and breathing techniques in bed to help you to fall asleep. Read the guide 'Sleep Well' for more information. You can download a free copy from www.mhim.org.uk

Get involved

Make a contribution to your local community. This gives you a sense of purpose and something to get out of bed for e.g. voluntary work, local interest groups.

Ask for help if you need it

Don't be ashamed to ask for emotional or practical help and support when you need it. We all need help sometimes. Seeking help early can stop problems getting worse. It's a sign of strength, not weakness. There is a list of resources at the end of this guide.

Other sources of help

Books

Your local library has books on how to overcome depression and anxiety, and how to live well with a long-term physical health condition. Your library can also be a good source of information about what services and local groups are available where you live.

Health professional

There are a range of treatments that can help you feel better. Your first step should be to visit your GP and discuss how you are feeling, what is available and the best way forward. Your GP may suggest ways you can help yourself, medication such as anti-depressants or talking therapies. In many cases a combination of treatments is most successful.

Helplines

- **The Samaritans**
They provide confidential emotional support for people who are having feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts.
Helpline: 116 123 (open 24/7)
- **Saneline**
Helpline: 0300 304 7000
(6pm to 11pm daily)

Websites

www.getselfhelp.co.uk

This website offers free Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) self-help information, resources and includes therapy worksheets.

www.llttf.com

The 'Living Life to the Full' website is a free, online life skills course. It covers a range of skills to help deal with everyday stresses.

www.mhim.org.uk

This is the 'Mental Health in Manchester' website. It has information about mental health issues and there are details of local services. It also includes information in a range of languages, and you can download the full range of self-help guides from this website.

buzzmanchester.co.uk

buzz Manchester Health & Wellbeing Service are experts in health improvement and self-care offering one to one support and training for a range of health and wellbeing issues.

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au

This website features free online self-help modules and resources.

ecouch.anu.edu.au

E-couch is a free interactive self-help program. It covers a range of topics. These include modules for depression, anxiety and worry.

moodgym.anu.edu.au

Moodgym is a free online self-help program. It covers a range of skills to help prevent and deal with depression.

www.rcpsych.ac.uk

This is the 'Royal College of Psychiatrists' website. It is an online mental health resource.

www.manchester.psd.org.uk

For help and support in Manchester.

