

buzz

Manchester  
Health & Wellbeing  
Service



# Physical Activity and Mood

A guide to increasing  
your physical activity



Produced by buzz Manchester Health & Wellbeing Service  
in partnership with Manchester Primary Care Mental Health Team.  
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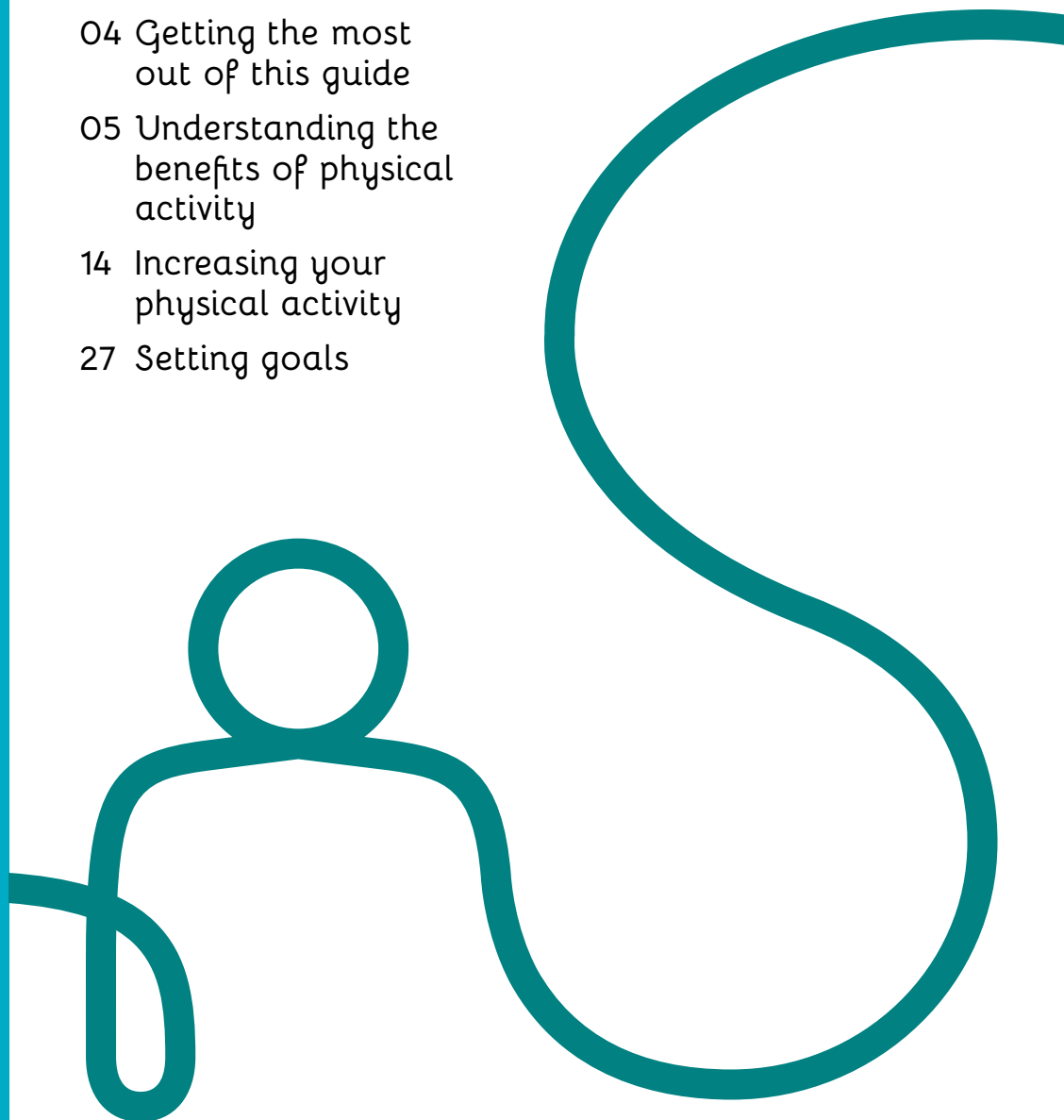
[www.buzzmanchester.co.uk](http://www.buzzmanchester.co.uk)

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](http://www.mhim.org.uk)

‘Physical Activity and Mood’ teaches you about how physical activity can improve your health and boost your mood.

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# Getting the most out of this guide

## This guide aims to:

- Help you think about the type and amount of physical activity you can do to improve your health
- Give you practical guidance about how to include more physical activity in your life
- Help you overcome issues that may make it difficult to start or stick to a more active lifestyle

## This guide will also help you if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Phobias
- Panic attacks
- Stress

If you are experiencing any of these problems it can affect how you might feel about taking part in physical activity.

Feeling anxious or depressed can result in a lack of energy and little motivation to do everyday things. However, taking part in physical activity on a regular basis can have a positive impact on our mental health and the symptoms that are associated with poor mental health.

# Understanding the benefits of physical activity

## There is evidence to suggest that physical activity can give you a positive outlook on life and improve your mental wellbeing.

It helps to build self-esteem, as well as improve concentration and sleep. It can also help prevent the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

## What scientific studies tell us:

- Weight: increasing the amount of physical activity you do can help reduce your weight, making you physically healthier, and more comfortable with how you feel about yourself. (Some people lose inches instead of weight because muscle weighs more than fat)
- Depression: a regular programme of physical activity can help people to overcome depression
- Stress and anxiety: even short bursts of activity can have a positive effect on reducing levels of anxiety and stress. For people who continue over several months the effects are more positive. Physical activity can improve how we react to stress and help us recover more quickly from stressful experiences
- Sleep: being regularly active, particularly in the daytime, can improve sleep quality. People who are regularly active fall asleep faster, and sleep longer and more deeply than inactive people
- Self-perception: physical activity can make people feel better about themselves, through changes in their body image, fitness levels and strength. Higher levels of physical activity are associated with more positive wellbeing, mood and overall life satisfaction
- Reduces the risk of dementia: being active regularly throughout your life can help to keep the brain healthy and reduce the risk of dementia in older age. It can also slow the rate of dementia in people who are in the early stages of dementia

## How physical activity benefits your mental health

1. There are certain chemicals in our brain that can make us feel happy. Physical activity can increase the production of these chemicals (called endorphins and enkephalins)
2. Physical activity can improve the way we look and feel about ourselves. This boosts our self-esteem
3. Exercise involves learning new skills and achieving goals, this may improve your self-worth
4. Taking part in physical activity can involve meeting new people. This could mean making new friends and feeling less isolated
5. Physical activity can divert your attention from your mood and negative thoughts and gives you something else to focus on taking you out of your low mood
6. A programme of physical activity can help give structure to your day. It gives you a sense of purpose and goals to work towards
7. Some physical activity can get you out of the house. This can mean you get fresh air and new scenery
8. Taking part in regular physical activity can improve the quantity and quality of your sleep because you exert more energy when active and become more relaxed afterwards

## The benefits of being physically active

Our physical and mental health are closely connected and if we feel benefits in one, we should feel benefits in the other.

Physically active people are more likely to:

- Be lively, energetic and alert
- Have fun
- Have a healthy diet
- Be healthier (physically and mentally)
- Lose weight
- Have a lower percentage of body fat
- Have stronger bones and muscles
- Have good posture
- Have joints that move well
- Be less prone to accidents
- Be happy with their body shape
- Have a reserve of energy
- Avoid disease and illness
- Lift, push and pull more easily
- Have a strong, healthy heart
- Have improved lung functioning
- Have a sense of wellbeing
- Have a sense of achievement

There are some benefits you can feel right away, for example:

- More relaxed
- Less stressed
- Less tense
- Less shaky
- More calm
- Better mood
- More focused
- Better concentration
- More composed
- Feeling more able to cope
- More energised
- Sleep better
- Less tired
- Sense of achievement
- Thinking clearer

## Symptoms checklist

Place a tick next to those symptoms you experience regularly:

How you feel...

- Anxious, nervous, frightened
- Depressed, low in mood, down
- Tense, stressed, uptight, on edge
- Angry and irritable about the slightest things
- Feeling alone even if you are in company
- Low in energy/tired

What happens to your body...

- Fast heart beat
- Chest feels tight or painful
- Sleep problems
- Changes in weight, appetite and eating
- Tense muscles
- Aches and pains

How you think...

- Losing confidence in yourself
- Can't concentrate
- Negative thoughts
- Constant worrying
- Imagining the worst and dwelling on it
- Thinking that everything seems hopeless

What you do...

- Lose interest in things you used to enjoy
- Get snappy and irritable
- Can't be bothered to do everyday tasks
- Restless
- Become hyperactive or under active

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms you could:

- Visit your GP for advice
- Refer to the contact list at the back of this guide
- Visit your local health information point located in public libraries
- Increase the amount of physical activity you do

“If you feel good and look good, it can increase your confidence and self-esteem.”

## Personal experiences of physical activity

### The joys of playing football

'I've always played and watched football. Playing football has helped me combat depression, by giving my mood a lift when I play and it is a good distraction from everyday stresses and strains.'

### Walking helps

'I feel better after a walk, it keeps my blood pressure down. It stops me being so sleepy and feeling so weak.'

'It is very uplifting spiritually, physically and is very therapeutic for my mental health. The scenery is breathtaking. It gives me a wonderful buzz and it doesn't matter about the weather.'

### Even if you are too tired

'Sometimes you feel too tired to exercise, but it's strange because if you can make yourself do it, you feel like you've got more energy afterwards. If you exercise with a friend, you can encourage each other, when one of you feels as though you can't be bothered.'

### You can feel the benefits immediately

'A lady came to a keep fit class run by an exercise tutor three weeks after being off antidepressants which she had been on for four years. She was very tearful, shaky, had no confidence, and felt that she could not do much. The instructor encouraged, praised and empathised with her. She took part and finished the whole class. After the class she told the tutor she felt better. The tutor made her aware how she was no longer trembling and shaking and was more composed rather than tearful. Also she looked more confident and relaxed.'

### Distance makes no difference

'I have been attending the Gardening Group for approximately six months. Although it is some distance, a change of scenery and being part of a group make it worth my while. It also gives me the opportunity to enjoy being outside and getting fresh air, which makes me feel happier mentally and physically. The group has inspired me to want to grow fruit and vegetables at home.'

# Physical activity guidelines

To stay healthy you should try to be active on a daily basis. Adults aged over 19 should aim to do at least:

- 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity every week
- Or, 75 minutes of high intensity activity every week (one minute of high activity is worth the same as two minutes of moderate activity)
- Or, a mix of both moderate and high activity. For example two 30 minute runs and one 30 minute fast walk counts as 150 minutes
- And, strength exercises on two or more days of the week that work all the major muscles (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms)

Older adults who are at risk of falls such as people with weak legs or some medical conditions should also do exercise to improve their balance and co-ordination such as Tai Chi, yoga and dancing.

One way to meet this is to do at least 30 minutes on five or more days a week. Your 30 minutes can be broken into three 10 minute slots to make it easier.

## Moderate intensity activity

Moderate intensity activity should not leave you so breathless that you cannot speak while you are doing the activity. If you cannot speak you are working too hard.

You will be working at the right level if you:

- Feel a bit warmer
- Feel a bit sweaty
- Feel like your heart is pumping a bit faster
- Makes you breathe a bit harder

Examples are walking fast, cycling on level ground, water aerobics, pushing a lawn mower, yoga, Tai Chi.

## High intensity activity

If you're working at this level you won't be able to say more than a few words without pausing for breath.

You will be working hard enough if:

- Your breathing is hard and fast
- Your heart rate has gone up quite a bit

Examples are hill walking, riding a bike fast or on hills, football, running, aerobics.

Guidelines can change. For more information go to [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness)

Strength and balance exercises such as Tai Chi and yoga are very good for:

- Strengthening core muscles
- Improving balance (useful if you are unsteady on your feet e.g. some medication can do that)
- Flexibility

Activities that work the major muscles include lifting weights, using resistance bands, heavy gardening and digging.

### Remember:

- If you haven't done any activity for ages, even a little bit will have a strong effect. Start slowly and build up bit by bit
- Find something you enjoy doing, you're more likely to stick to it
- Every little helps!

# Increasing your physical activity

A good starting point can be to look at the amount of physical activity you do now as a basis for making any changes.

Take a look at the list of activities and tick whether you do them often, sometimes or never.

This test should provide you with a baseline of where you are starting from and where you could make changes. For example if you've ticked activities that you never do, then you may want to start doing them sometimes.

If you start to make changes, take the test again after a week, then after a second week, to see what changes you have made.



## How much physical activity do you do?



Tick (y) yes, (s) sometimes or (n) no.

y s n

Do you walk instead of taking the bus or car whenever possible, e.g. do you walk to the local shops?

Do you walk briskly? (At a pace that keeps you warm and slightly out of breath)

Do you use stairs instead of lifts wherever you can?

When you do housework do you do it vigorously?  
e.g. cleaning

Can you carry shopping bags without feeling breathless?

Can you walk up a hill or stairs without feeling completely out of breath?

If you have a bike do you ride it?

In a day, do you do something that makes you feel warmer and slightly out of breath?

Are you physically active for a total of 150 minutes each week?



## Small steps to getting started

Physical activity can easily become part of your daily life. Try some of the following to help get you started:

- Walk around the house during the TV adverts
- Walk up and down the stairs a few times a day
- Get off the bus a stop earlier and walk the rest of the way
- Walk to the local shops instead of taking the car or going by bus
- Use the stairs instead of the lift
- Try marching on the spot whilst you're watching TV
- If you drive, park as far away as possible from where you need to be
- Hide the TV remote
- Be more vigorous with everyday activities like housework e.g. cleaning windows, hoovering stairs
- Do some gardening
- Hand wash the car
- Get your bike out of the shed and use it!
- Take a walk around your local park
- Become active/run around with the kids or your grandchildren
- Try dancing such as line dancing or salsa or what used to be called 'disco dancing'
- Go for a walk on your lunch break
- Walk to the shop to buy your milk and paper instead of getting it delivered
- When meeting a friend go for a walk together

“Choosing a physical activity that you enjoy doing will help keep you motivated.”

# Which activity is right for you?

If you are unsure, which activity is right for you, it's useful to consider exactly what you want to achieve:

- If you want to use physical activity purely for social and leisure purposes, then any activity counts
- If it's to address a physical health issue such as lowering blood pressure or losing weight then it's best to consult your GP as different exercises are better than others
- If it's to help your mental health then ask for advice from whoever is helping you to coordinate your treatment plan or from the list of contacts towards the back of this guide

In order to ensure that you stick to a healthy, active lifestyle make sure you choose activities that:


- You can do regularly e.g. walking to the local shops, taking a longer walking route
- You can fit easily into your daily routine
- Fit with your sleep pattern e.g. avoid morning activity if you are more alert later in the day
- Can be done at a place near where you live
- Don't have to depend on the weather or any other factors that might be out of your control e.g. exercising at home, going to the leisure centre
- Are appropriate to your existing level of fitness

People enjoy physical activity for different reasons:

- Some people like time to themselves whereas other people enjoy company
- Some people like to be outside whereas others may prefer to be inside
- Some people enjoy being part of a team or even activities where there is an element of competition involved
- Some people like physical activity to fit into daily life
- Some people use it to take a break from work or housework

## Did You Know?

Studies have shown that continuing an exercise programme for 16 weeks can equal the effects of taking antidepressant medication. And you don't get the side effects!



Exercise

What do you enjoy about physical activity?

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What would make you enjoy physical activity more?

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## Thinking about the reasons why you want to become more physically active could also help you choose an activity.

Tick all those that apply to you.

### I want to:

- Improve my health
- Improve my body shape
- Improve my body tone
- Lose weight
- Look and feel younger
- Increase my energy levels

- Keep fit or get fitter
- Lower my blood pressure
- Lower my cholesterol
- Reduce stress
- Reduce depression
- Reduce anxiety
- Reduce my tension
- Forget my worries
- Feel good about myself
- Let off steam
- Improve my sleep patterns
- Get outdoors
- Make new friends
- Spend time with others
- Have time for myself
- Be part of a group
- Other (please specify):

Now see if the following activities involve any of the things that you enjoy doing:

- Aerobics
- Badminton
- Bowls
- Brisk walking
- Cricket
- Curling
- Cycling
- Dancing
- Energetic housework
- Football
- Golf
- Gym
- Gardening
- Horse riding
- Jogging
- Netball
- Rowing
- Running
- Squash
- Swimming
- Tai Chi
- Tennis
- Weight training
- Yoga



## Tips for safe physical activity

**Talk to your GP before embarking upon a programme of physical activity. This is particularly important if you have a medical problem or are on medication.**

### Do you have the right clothing and footwear?

Clothing should be loose and not tight fitting to allow full range of movement. Footwear should be flat, no heels and not be open toed. Try to wear shoes that cover your whole foot and support your ankle. Footwear is especially important during the winter months when it gets icy, slippery and/or wet under foot. A pair of walking shoes or boots with a rubber sole and a good deep tread are important to keep you upright!

### Do you feel unwell?

If you feel unwell, you should not take part in physical activity. If you are recovering from a cold or flu you should only take part in low level activities, i.e. easy activities such as walking but fast enough to keep your circulation going.

### Have you just eaten a meal?

You should leave two hours between eating a large meal and taking part in moderate or strenuous physical activity, walking is usually OK. This is especially important if you are diabetic or have heart problems/disease.

Take plenty of water with you to drink when you become thirsty. Drinking water will prevent dehydration by replacing fluids lost when you are exercising.

### Whilst taking part in physical activity remember the following:

- Start slowly and build up gradually, don't push yourself too far
- Work at your own pace rather than trying to keep up with other people
- Always make sure you warm up for ten minutes before the activity and cool down for ten minutes after the activity. This allows your heart to slow down properly and makes it less likely that your muscles will ache the next day
- Never stop abruptly
- Remember that the phrase 'no pain no gain' is not true! There should be no pain or strain
- You should always be working at a level where you are still able to hold a conversation. If you find you are so breathless you are unable to speak, slow down
- You should stop the activity and seek medical advice if you experience any of the following: chest pain, constant coughing or wheezing, dizziness, light headedness, loss of balance, confusion, cold sweats, blueness, fainting or sharp pains in muscles and joints



## How to stay motivated

Often, if you are using physical activity to help with a mental health problem, the very nature of that problem can make it hard to get motivated.

For example if you are feeling down, it can be a struggle to get up and out every day. Similarly, the side effects of some medications can make you feel tired and lethargic. Here are some tips on how to stay motivated.

### Set measurable goals

Set goals for yourself, giving you something more concrete to work towards. See 'Setting goals' on page 27 to help you do this. You can get a physical activity instructor, Wellbeing Advisor or your support worker to help you work out your goals. This will also help you if you are not sure what activity to start with that matches your level of fitness and what you want to achieve. Get a step-o-meter (pedometer) to check just how active you are. This will measure the number of steps you do in a day. Your target should be 10,000 steps every day (15,000 if you are overweight). When you achieve this you can move onto longer walks.

### Start with a friend

Involve a friend or someone else to take part with you. You can help motivate each other.

However don't be disheartened if they can't make it or quit. Make sure the activity is something you would enjoy on your own too.

### Know what to expect

If you're joining a gym, pay a visit the day before to familiarise yourself with how to get there and get a feel for the place.

You should be given an induction by an instructor on how to use the gym equipment and they can tell you about warm up and cool down exercises. Once you start you can always ask an instructor for help if you are uncertain or want to learn a new activity.

If you join an exercise class try to meet or speak to the tutor before the start of the class.

Plan to take someone with you on the first couple of occasions whilst you familiarise yourself and start to meet new people (a buzz Wellbeing Advisor may be able to help you with this).

### Make use of supported activity

Some mental health services offer physical activity sessions e.g. walks, football or gym sessions. See this as a stepping stone to help you on your way to making use of more public activities. You can ask your support worker or a health trainer to help you find ways to move on.

### Don't make excuses

If you are unable to make time for an activity or exercise session every now and then that's fine, everyone has off days. Some reasons for putting your exercise routine on hold might be: becoming unwell, poor mental health, holidays, changes in life situation, family demands, side effects of medication.

Don't let yourself off too easily though. If you think you could still do some exercise but you have a headache, for example, you can just do a lighter activity or cut down your workout time. At least you are still doing something and you will feel much better afterwards.

### Be prepared

Always have an exercise bag ready with your exercise gear e.g. shoes, water bottle, towel, exercise clothes and a change of clothing. That way if you are well enough you can't make any excuses.

### Reward yourself

Recognise your achievements. It helps if you write them down, you can use the physical activity diary to keep track of your progress. See page 28. Keep a note of your positive feelings/mood and physical changes after any activity you have done. Treat yourself with a healthy reward when you feel comfortable that you have made some positive progress!

### Accountability

Tell someone else who is very positive and supportive of what you are trying to do and how you are going about it. Any type of encouragement will help to keep you motivated.

# Setting goals

It may help to plan some activities and write down what you want to get from them.

Think of what you want to achieve (this is your long-term goal) and then think of some small steps that will help you achieve this (short-term goals). It will help if your goals are realistic, so that you have a good chance of achieving them and they are easy to measure.

## Examples of long-term goals:

- Get rid of my belly
- Look slimmer
- Get fitter
- Save money on buses and cars through walking
- Keep up with the kids

Below is an example of how to plan your goals:



**Long-term goal:**  
Lose weight

**Choice of activity:**  
Walking, jogging, running

**Starting level of fitness:**  
Unfit

### Steps to achieve goal:

- For first four weeks, for five days each week: in the morning, afternoon and evening carry out five to ten minutes of walking for 30 steps and then jog for ten steps
- After four weeks if ready to progress, for five days each week: in the morning, afternoon and evening carry out ten minutes of walking for two minutes and then jog for 30 seconds



Use this table to plan any long-term goals that you want to achieve.

Long-term goal:

Choice of activity:

Starting level of fitness:

Steps to achieve goal:

Long-term goal:

Choice of activity:

Starting level of fitness:

Steps to achieve goal:

# Physical activity diary

Example

The physical activity diary will help you to monitor your progress and reflect back on how well you're doing. It can be motivating to see the progress you have made.

### Make note of:

- When you plan to be physically active
- The type of activity you do
- The length of time you were active for
- Any positive mental or physical changes you notice afterwards

Daily activity				
	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Comments
Mon			30 minutes brisk walk to a friends	Felt more relaxed
Tues	Ten minutes brisk walk to the shops		One hour football	Felt energised after the walk Made some friends at football
Wed		One hour aerobics class		Slept better

Exercise

Use this diary to record the level of activity you will do throughout the week.

Use the example on page 28 to help.

Daily activity				
	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Comments
Mon				
Tues				
Wed				
Thurs				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

## Other sources of help

### Health information

Visit your local public library for books and other resources on all aspects of your physical and mental wellbeing.

Libraries stock recommended self-help books to manage mental health problems such as depression and anxiety and promote wellbeing. Reading can also be a way to reduce stress and boost mood.

Libraries are also a good source of information about activities going on in your area that can help you to become more active.

### Organisations

- **Manchester City Council**  
The Help and Support Manchester website has lists of services, groups and activities in the area that can help you get more fit and active.  
[manchester.fsd.org.uk](http://manchester.fsd.org.uk)
- **NHS Change4life**  
This campaign has a great website with lots of hints and tips on how you can become more active within your own home.  
[www.nhs.uk/change4life](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life)

### Your ideas

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### Websites offering support for mental health

#### [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

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

#### [www.llttf.com](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)

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

#### [ecouch.anu.edu.au](http://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](http://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](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)

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