Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave.

CBT cannot remove your problems, but can help you manage them in a more positive way. It encourages you to examine how your actions can affect how you think and feel.

Talking and changing your behaviour can change how you think (cognitive) and what you do (behaviour). This can make you feel better about life.

When is CBT used?

CBT has been shown to be particularly helpful at tackling problems such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders and drug misuse.

Unlike other types of talking treatments, such as psychotherapy, CBT deals with your current problems, rather than focusing on issues from your past. It looks for practical ways to improve your state of mind on a daily basis.

CBT can also be used to treat people with long-term health conditions, such as arthritis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). CBT cannot cure the physical symptoms of these health conditions, but can help people cope better with them.

How CBT works

CBT works by helping you make sense of overwhelming problems by breaking them down into smaller parts.

Your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions are interconnected, often trapping you in a negative spiral.

CBT helps you stop these negative cycles. It aims to break down factors that are making you feel bad, anxious or scared so that they are more manageable. It can show you how to change these negative patterns to improve the way you feel.

CBT sessions

If CBT is recommended, you will usually have a session with a therapist once a week or once every two weeks.

Some problems may require more intensive intervention and a therapist may spend several hours at your home to encourage you to face your fears.

Overall, the number of sessions you need will depend on your individual problems and objectives. Treatment usually lasts six weeks to twelve weeks.
Pros and cons of CBT

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages associated with CBT.

Research has shown that CBT can be as effective as medicine in treating depression and other mental health problems. Compared with other talking therapies, CBT can also be completed over a relatively short period of time.

However, to benefit from CBT, you need to commit yourself to the process. A therapist can help and advise you, but they cannot make your problems go away without your full co-operation.

Also, due to the structured nature of CBT it may not be suitable for people with more complex mental health needs or learning difficulties.