

# 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.

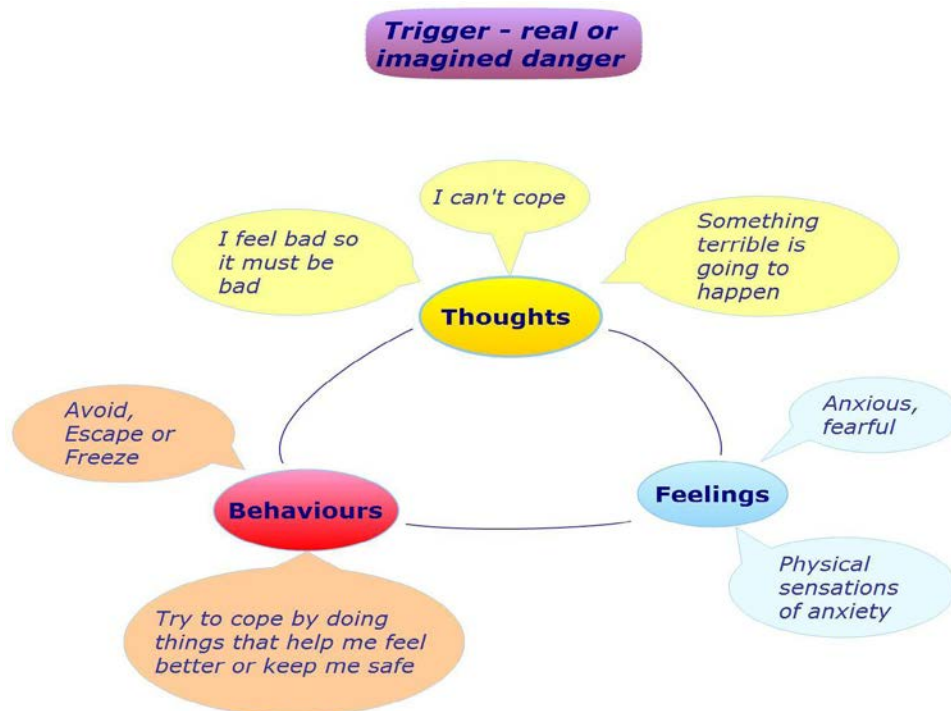
CBT cannot remove your problems, but can help you manage them in a more positive way. It encourages you to examine how your actions can affect how you think and feel. Talking and changing your behaviour can change how you think (cognitive) and what you do (behaviour). This can make you feel better about life.

## Cognitive behavioural therapy - How it works

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help you make sense of overwhelming problems by breaking them down into smaller parts.

Your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions are interconnected – each one can affect the others.

For example, your thoughts about a problem can often affect how you feel both physically and emotionally, as well as how you act on the problem.



People who have experienced a nerve injury can spend many hours thinking about the procedure and wishing they had not had it done. They can have many unhelpful thoughts about the subsequent impact of this procedure on their life, and people can struggle with strong emotions connected to the event. This can have a significant impact on how they live their life, and can interfere markedly in relationships with family, friends and work colleagues. Addressing these in therapy can help to minimise their impact and enable you to return to a better quality of life.

## Stopping negative thought cycles

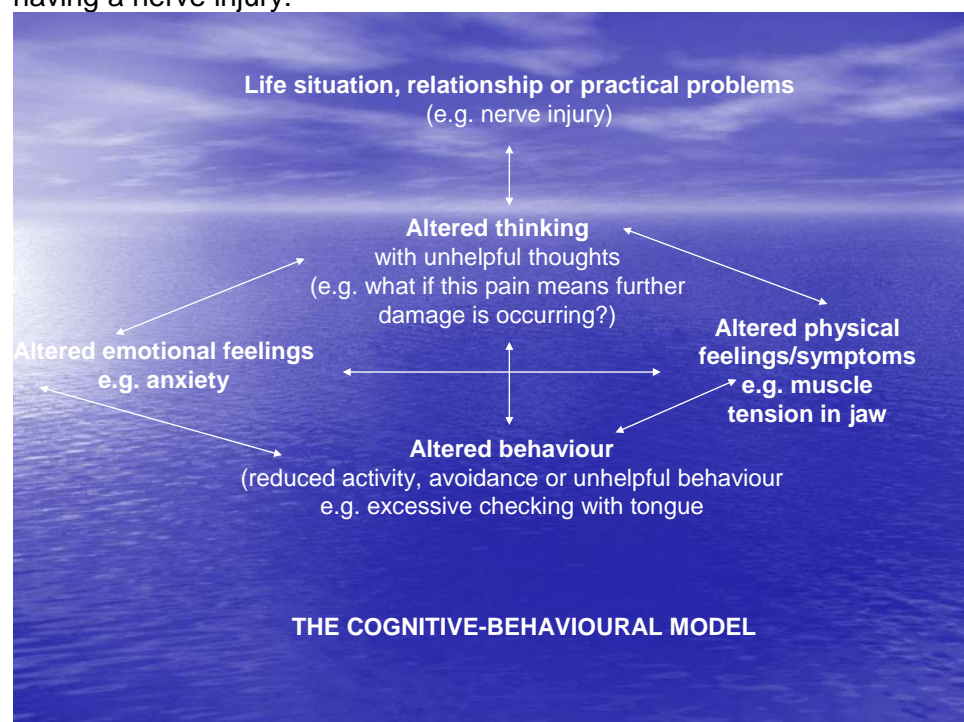
There are helpful and unhelpful ways of reacting to a situation, often determined by how you think about them.

For example, if your marriage has ended in divorce, you might think you have failed and that you are not capable of having another meaningful relationship. This could lead to you feeling hopeless, lonely, depressed and tired, so you stop going out and meeting new people. You become trapped in a negative cycle, sitting at home alone and feeling bad about yourself.

However, instead of accepting this thought pattern, after your divorce you could accept that many marriages end, learn from your mistakes and move on and feel optimistic about the future. Feeling energetic may result in you becoming more socially active, and you may start evening classes and develop a new circle of friends.

This is a simplified example, but it illustrates how certain thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions can trap you in a negative cycle and even create new situations that make you feel worse about yourself.

The diagram below shows how CBT can understand thoughts that develop from having a nerve injury:



CBT aims to stop negative cycles such as these by breaking down things that make you feel bad, anxious or scared. By making your problems more manageable, CBT can help you change your negative thought patterns and improve the way you feel.

CBT can help you get to a point where you can achieve this on your own and tackle problems without the help of a therapist.

### **CBT sessions**

If you have CBT on an individual basis, you will usually meet with a CBT therapist for between five and 20 weekly or fortnightly sessions, with each session lasting 60 minutes.

The first session will be spent making sure CBT is the right therapy for you, and that you are comfortable with the process. The therapist will ask questions about your life

and background. You will decide what you want to deal with in the short, medium and long-term.

With the help of your therapist, you will break down a problem into its separate parts – the situation, thoughts, emotions, physical feelings and actions. To help with this, your therapist may ask you to keep a diary or write down your thought and behaviour patterns.

You and your therapist will look at your thoughts, feelings and behaviours to work out if they are unhelpful and to determine the effect they have on each other and on you. Your therapist will be able to help you work out how to change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

After working out what you can change, your therapist will ask you to practise these changes in your daily life. This may involve identifying and addressing upsetting thoughts, or recognising when you are going to do something that will make you feel worse and instead doing something more helpful.

At each session, you will discuss with your therapist how you have got on with putting the changes into practice and what it felt like. Your therapist will be able to make other suggestions to help you.

### **Cognitive behavioural therapy - Considerations**

- Research has shown cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can be as effective as medicine in treating depression and other mental health problems. Skills you learn in CBT are useful, practical and helpful strategies that can be incorporated into everyday life to help you cope better with future stresses and difficulties.
- However, for CBT to be successful, a committed approach is required, and it may not be suitable for everyone.

'Refresher' CBT courses are also available if you feel you need to go through skills you have learnt again.

### **Self Help**

There are a number of CBT resources for Self Help for a variety of problems the following links are some of those available.

#### Computerised CBT

A number of interactive software programs are now available that replicate some functions of a CBT therapist. Two programs approved for use by the NHS are:

- [Beating the blues](#) – approved for treating [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and [phobias](#)
- [Fear fighter](#) – approved for use in people with phobias and [panic attacks](#)

However, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) states in its guidance about [depression in adults \(PDF, PDF, 2.6Mb\)](#) that other, similar computerised CBT (CCBT) packages may also be effective.

Some people prefer using a computer rather than talking to a therapist about their private feelings. The software can also be used as an introduction to CBT.

Evidence suggests that using computerised CBT packages can help treat anxiety and depressive disorders, particularly when used in conjunction with a therapist.

Free online CBT resources

1. Mood Gym: information, quizzes, games and skills training to help prevent depression <http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/>
2. Living Life to the Full: free online life skills course for people feeling distressed and their carers. Helps you understand why to feel as you do and make changes in your thinking, activities, sleep and relationships <http://www.livinglifetothefull.com/>

Commercial CBT self-help packages

[Fear Fighter](#) [Living life to the Full Interactive](#) [Overcoming Anorexia Online](#) (for carers)

[Overcoming Bulimia Online](#)

[Virtual Reality Treatments](#)

Bulletin Board support groups and information for those with mental health problems

[Transformations](#)

[Psychobabble](#)

[Five Areas](#)