

# Your mind matters



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### 1) Join our Readers' Panel.

Readers' Panel members are invited to give their views on our books and services. We'd love to hear from you if you're interested in joining our Readers' Panel.

For more information, visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel).

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We'd love to hear from you about your experience of using our services. We'll use your story to help us improve our services and to share with other people who are using our services.

For more information, visit [stories@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:stories@ageuk.org.uk).

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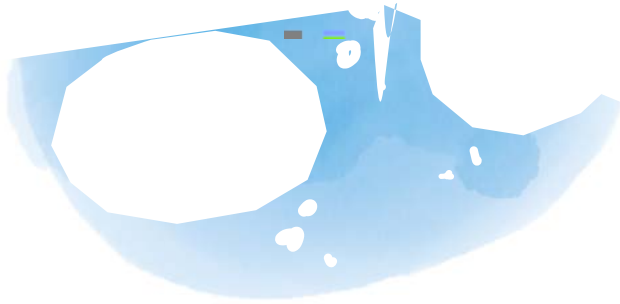
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## What this guide is about

**Feeling worried, low or out of sorts – or losing the energy to do things you used to enjoy – isn't just part and parcel of getting older. It could be an important sign that you're not feeling as well as you could be.**

There are plenty of reasons why your mood might change. But it's important to know that if you've not been feeling yourself lately – whatever the reason – there's support available.

This guide covers some of the symptoms of more common mental health problems, why you might be experiencing your symptoms, and what support is available.

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## Good to know

There are lots of organisations we've included a couple below in our 'organisations' section on pages 27-32.

Call Samaritans at any time of day or night if you need someone to talk to: **116 123**

Call the Mind Infoline for help with mental health problems: **0300 123 3393**.

Sometimes, your emotions can be so overwhelming that you feel you might harm yourself. If so, it's important to seek help. If you've harmed yourself or think you might, call **999** or go to A&E.

# Rethinking mental health



# How you might be feeling

It can be tricky to recognise the symptoms of a mental health problem. This means they can be overlooked or mistaken for physical health conditions or just part of getting older.

## Spotting signs and symptoms

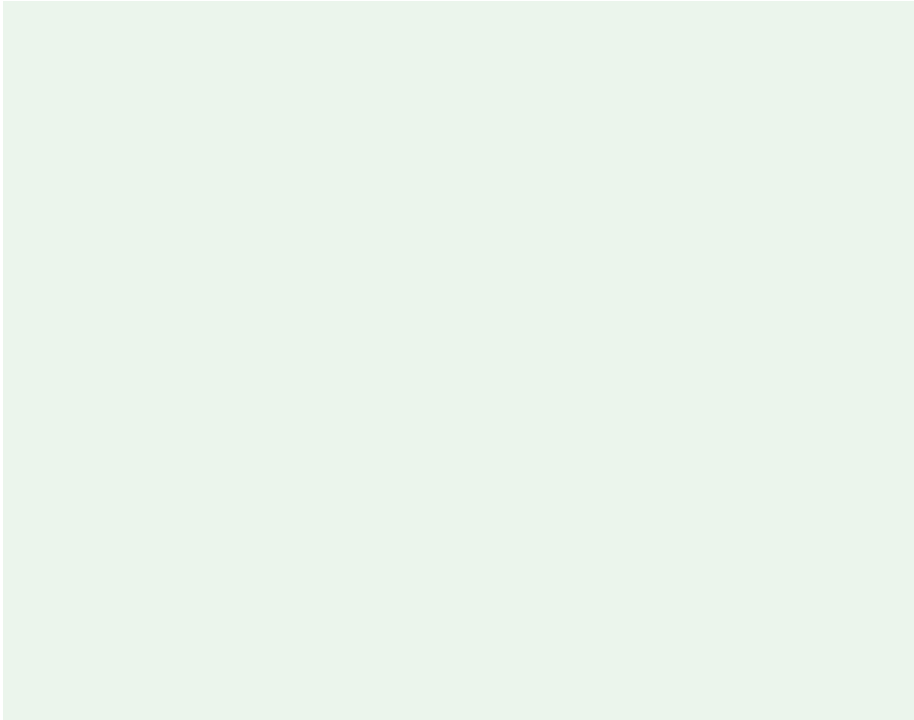
Recognising the signs and symptoms of a problem is the first step towards helping yourself feel better.

If you're experiencing things listed on these pages, it's worth speaking to your healthcare professional about them – whatever the cause, they might be able to help.

### Changes to your mood:

- feeling low
- feeling irritable, restless or tense
- feeling guilty, worthless or hopeless
- feeling numb
- feeling isolated
- feeling like bad things will happen to you or your loved ones
- feeling tired all the time
- feeling confused or forgetting things
- worrying a lot and not being able to relax
- finding no pleasure in things you used to enjoy.





## Feeling low

Everyone feels down from time to time – and usually it passes. But if you've been feeling down for a while, or if you often feel down, then it's important to speak to someone.

Maybe the activities you used to enjoy aren't giving you as much pleasure anymore. That isn't just part of getting older like some people think – we should experience happiness and enjoyment whatever our age.

Perhaps start by telling a family member, or your doctor or nurse – whoever you feel comfortable with. Remember that healthcare professionals see lots of people with similar feelings and they know how to help.

It can be hard to admit you're feeling low, but talking to someone can take some of the weight I so0.8 (o)2.3 (u)5.9 ('/t)10.8IGC933 /P

# Feeling worried

'Anxiety' describes how we're feeling when we're worried,

# Feeling lonely

There are lots of reasons you might be feeling lonely. Perhaps you've moved away from friends and family, or you've retired and you're missing the social contact you had through work. Perhaps you have health problems that make it more difficult to get out and about. Or perhaps you're coming to terms with the death of a loved one.

You can be surrounded by people but still feel lonely if you're not getting enough of the kind of social contact that feels meaningful to you.

Loneliness can have a real impact on mental wellbeing. If you speak to your healthcare professional, they might be able to suggest things you can do to help.

## Good to know

Age UK runs a telephone befriending service which allows you to sign up for a free weekly chat on the phone. It can be a great way to speak to someone new. Search 'telephone friendship' on the Age UK website or call **0800 434 6105** to find out more.

In Wales, if you're aged 70 or over, you can register for a free weekly call from Age Cymru's Friend in Need service. Search 'Friend in Need' on the Age Cymru website or to find out more call **0300 303830** or **07367003670** or **0930118183830/50**

## Joe found it tricky to adjust to retirement.

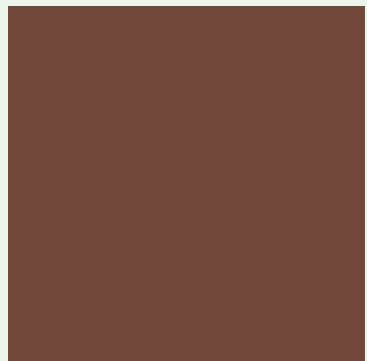
After he retired, Joe found himself missing the routine and structure of work.

'I'd looked forward to retiring for a few years, and at first it was great not having to get up early.

'But people don't tell you that retirement isn't always so easy once you get there. After a couple of months, I felt myself wondering what there was to get up for. I was spending a lot of time just sitting on the sofa and watching TV.

'I knew I should get out and do something – but it was hard to motivate myself. Then one day I was reading my local paper and I saw an advert for a walking group.

'It wasn't easy turning up by myself but one of the regulars, Ron, made a real effort to introduce me to everyone and make me feel welcome. I go on a couple of walks a week now – and I really look forward to them. The thing is, you don't even realise you've gone into your shell until you start doing things again.'



# Why you might be feeling like this

Knowing what might be having an impact on your mental wellbeing could help you think about steps you can take to look after yourself.

Below we've listed some of the most common things that can affect how we feel – but there are plenty of other things that might be going on. There might not even be a clear reason for how you're feeling – and that's OK. The key thing is to try to talk to someone about it, whether that's a loved one or a healthcare professional.

## Retirement

Lots of us look forward to retirement – but we're often so busy thinking about what we're retiring from that we don't take time to think about what we're retiring to.

While those first few months of not having to set the alarm can make a nice change, the novelty can wear off. And sometimes, losing that routine or that sense of purpose day-to-day can have an impact on our mental health.



## Bereavement

Grieving for a loved one affects us all differently. You might experience a real mix of feelings – from sadness, emptiness and fear to anger, guilt and relief.

You'll probably have bad days and better days. If you're finding your feelings of grief overwhelming, or if you feel like you're not coping with day-to-day things, then it might be time to seek help and support. Our guide

## **Disability or poor health**

As we get older, poor health can affect our confidence – especially in the case of chronic illness. We can feel less independent and more anxious about the future. It can become harder to get out and do things, which can be very frustrating.

There might be local transport services in your area – some local councils have Ring and Ride schemes, for instance. Your local Age UK or Age Cymru might be able to help you find a service if they don't offer one themselves.

Pain due to health issues can take a toll on how you feel too – as can the side effects of certain medications.

If your physical health is affecting your mental health, talk to your doctor to see if there's anything they can do. Make sure you don't stop taking any medication before speaking to your doctor, as it can be dangerous to stop suddenly.

## **Relationship or family problems**

Personal relationships – whether between partners, other family members, or friends – can become strained from time to time and have a real impact on how you feel. Whatever the situation, try to discuss your worries with a loved one or a





## Getting help

We can all feel a bit low sometimes – but if these feelings aren't going away and you're feeling out of sorts, it's important to talk about it. If you've not been feeling like yourself, ask your healthcare professional about what help is available.

## When to seek help

If how you're feeling is affecting your day-to-day life, it's probably time to make an appointment to see your doctor. Talking about these things can feel daunting, but your doctor will be used to having these conversations. They're there to help – they won't judge you.

Depending on your symptoms, your doctor might use a questionnaire to find out how you're feeling. Sometimes they might ask about whether you want to end your life. Some people are surprised by questions about this – but it's important that they get raised in case it's helpful. You might even be relieved that you're being asked to talk about it.

You can talk in complete confidence – they'll listen and help you get back on track. But if you're nervous, ask if you can take someone with you to your appointment as moral support.

## Different types of help

Once the doctor has looked at what might be causing your feelings, they'll talk to you about different treatment options. These will depend on the feelings you've been having, how long you've been having them, whether you've had any treatment

## **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**

CBT is based on the idea that the way we feel is affected by

**“My GP suggested talking therapy to me. I said no at first, as I didn’t think it was for me. But now I wish I’d started sooner.”**



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### **‘Wait and see’ or ‘watchful waiting’**

If your symptoms are mild, they might improve by themselves. In this case, you should be given information and advice about coping with them. Your doctor may then monitor your symptoms over a period of time to see if they improve.

### **Self-help**

Your doctor might suggest you have a look at self-help resources or groups. These can be a great way to find support, share ideas on what helps, boost your mood, and gain confidence. Meeting other people who understand what you’re going through can be helpful too.

Alongside other treatment options, your doctor may suggest you work through a self-help book or tell you about online therapy programmes that can help you cope.

Some types of self-help involve very little contact with a healthcare professional, while others involve talking to someone every few weeks to review your progress.

## **Applied relaxation**

If you have anxiety, you might be offered applied relaxation. This teaches you to use relaxation techniques to help you cope in situations where you feel anxious. It usually consists of weekly hour-long sessions, delivered by trained practitioners over 12-15 weeks.

## **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a technique to help you focus more on the

# Things you can do that might make you feel better

### **3. Eat well and drink sensibly**

What we eat and drink can have a real impact on how we feel. Try not to fill up on too many unhealthy things – but also be alert to any signs you may not be eating enough, such as losing weight unexpectedly. Our guide **Healthy living** has more information about diet options and drinking sensibly.

### **4. Keep active**

As well as keeping you healthy, being active is a great way to improve your mood, as it increases the production of endorphins (the brain chemicals that help you to deal with pain or stress).

Being active can also clear your mind and help you relax. It's never too late to start being more active – and there are lots of simple ways to move more. Even things like gardening or going for a walk can make a difference to your mood.

### **5. Create structure to your day and set yourself goals**

Most of us look forward to having more time to ourselves – but when it actually happens, it can be hard to adjust to the loss of structure and sense of purpose in our day.

Setting goals and making plans can help bring purpose and meaning to our lives. Start small and make sure you're realistic – for example, you could set yourself a goal to go for a 10-minute walk each day. You could also choose to do some volunteering to help give yourself routine and structure.

**“My husband has depression. I make sure we do something out and about at least once a week.”**





Be there.





## Alzheimer's Society

Offers advice, information and support in England and Wales

## Cruse

Offers a dedicated helpline and counselling to support people who have been bereaved.

Helpline: **0808 808 1677**

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

## Dementia UK

Provides information to those affected by dementia, their family, friends and carers. Offers a helpline staffed by Admiral

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## Mental Health Foundation

Offers information and support on mental health.

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

## Ramblers

Runs a network of health walking schemes in England, Wales and Scotland.

Tel: 020 3961 3300

[www.ramblers.org.uk/wellbeing-walks](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/wellbeing-walks)

In Wales, contact [Ramblers Cymru](#)

Tel: 020 3961 3310

[www.ramblers.org.uk/wales](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/wales)

In Northern Ireland, contact [Walk NI](#)

[www.walkni.com](http://www.walkni.com)

## Re-engage

Runs activities such as regular tea parties to provide older people with social connections.

Tel: 0800 716543

[www.reengage.org.uk](http://www.reengage.org.uk)

## Relate

Offers support with personal relationships online, over the phone, or via its network of Relate centres.

[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

## Rethink Mental Illness

Provides information and support to anyone severely affected by mental health problems.

Tel: 0808 801 0525

Email: [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

## SANE

Raises awareness and combats stigma about mental illness.

SANEline (open between 4pm and 10pm): 0300 304 7000

Email: [support@sane.org.uk](mailto:support@sane.org.uk)

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

## **Samaritans**

Confidential helpline offering support to talk about your feelings. Lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Tel: **116 123**

**[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

## **Switchboard – LGBT+ helpline**

Provides information and support for anyone in the UK dealing with issues relating to their sexuality.

Tel (open between 10am and 10pm): **0800 0119 100**

**[www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt)**

## **University of the Third Age**

Network of groups for older people who learn together informally.

Tel: **020 8466 6139**

**[www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)**







# Help us be there for someone else

We hope you found this guide helpful. When times are tough, it's so important to get some support. Did you know you could help us reach someone else who needs a little help? Here's how:

1

## Give your views on guides like this

Our Readers' Panel helps make sure the information we produce is right for older people and their families. We'd love you to join. Go to [www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel).

2

## Donate to us

Every donation we receive helps us be there for someone when they need us. To make a donation, call us on 0800 169 8787 or go to [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate).

3

## Volunteer with us

Our volunteers make an incredible difference to people's lives. Get involved by contacting your local Age UK or at [www.ageuk.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/volunteer).

4

## Campaign with us

We campaign to make life better for older people, and rely on the help of our strong network of campaigners. Add your voice to our latest campaigns at [www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns).

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## Remember us in your will

A gift to Age UK in your will is a very special way of helping older people get expert support in the years to come. Find out more by calling 020 3033 1421 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/legacy](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/legacy).

# What should I do now?

You may want to read some of our relevant information guides and factsheets, such as:

- **Healthy living**
- **Bereavement**
- **Getting help with debt**

You can order any of our guides or factsheets by giving our Advice Line a ring for free on **0800 169 65 65** (8am-7pm, 365 days a year).

Our friendly advisers are there to help answer any questions.

All of our publications are available in large print and audio formats.

There's plenty of really useful information on our website, too. Visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/yourmindmatters](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/yourmindmatters) to get started.



**0800 169 65 65**  
**[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**



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