Keeping Well After Living Well: Sustaining Progress in Long-Term Conditions and Chronic Pain

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After Living Well: Sustaining Progress in Long-Term Conditions and Chronic Pain

A Step-2 Guided Self-Help Programme

A self-help workbook · 7 modules · about 7 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Keeping Well After Living Well: Sustaining Progress in Long-Term Conditions and Chronic Pain programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. Its text is drawn from the programme and is kept current with it: whenever the programme changes, the workbook is set again.

Revision 5. This printing was set on 11 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on using this workbook. It offers self-help based on established psychological approaches for difficulties of mild to moderate severity. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment by a qualified professional and is not designed for use in a crisis. The examples in it are fictional; no real person appears in them. If you are worried about your safety, or your difficulties are getting worse, the page headed “When self-help is not enough” says where to turn.

Set in Poppins and Roboto, the Talking Therapies UK typefaces.

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How to use this workbook

This programme builds on the success of the Living Well course, using CBT and other evidence-based techniques that have been shown to help people manage long-term conditions and chronic pain. It offers practical tools and strategies to maintain improvements, prevent relapse and stay on track with self-management. The content is delivered in short, 30-minute modules that you can work through at your own pace, with guidance from a trained therapist.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After Living Well: Sustaining Progress in Long-Term Conditions and Chronic Pain programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. It follows the programme module by module: each part of the book is one module, and each chapter is one piece of the module's teaching, set in the order the programme presents it.

Read the chapters of a part in order, then turn to the worksheets that follow them. The worksheets are the part of the work that changes things, so give them the time they ask for and come back to them as the weeks go on. You may copy or print the worksheets for your own use, as often as you need.

Most people work through one module a week, which takes the whole programme about 7 weeks. Go at the pace that suits you: a module done properly is worth more than two done quickly.

The check-in questionnaires let you see how things are changing. Complete each one when you reach it, note the date and your total, and compare it with the last.

When self-help is not enough

- If you are in danger now, or have seriously harmed yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- If you need help urgently but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 or contact your GP surgery.
- Samaritans are there day and night, every day of the year: call 116 123 free from any phone.
- If you would rather not talk, text SHOUT to 85258 for free, confidential support at any hour.
- If your difficulties are getting worse as you work through this book, or you find yourself thinking about ending your life, stop and speak to your GP or a mental health professional. A workbook can be a good start, and some difficulties need more help than a book can give.

What this workbook will help you to do

- You will learn how long-term conditions and chronic pain affect your body and mind, and why CBT can help you manage symptoms and improve quality of life. You will also gain insight into the cycle of pain, thoughts and behaviours that can maintain distress.
- You will discover how to set realistic, achievable goals that align with your values and priorities. You will learn to break larger goals into manageable steps and track progress over time.
- You will learn to recognise negative thought patterns that amplify pain and distress, and practice techniques to replace them with balanced, evidence-based thoughts. You will also understand how thoughts influence emotions and behaviours.

- You will learn how to plan and gradually increase activities that you enjoy, while pacing yourself to avoid flare-ups. You will also develop strategies to maintain a healthy balance between rest and activity.
- You will learn how to record pain levels, mood, activity and thoughts in a simple diary, helping you identify patterns and triggers. This information will guide you in making informed adjustments to your routine.
- You will practice relaxation exercises, mindfulness and grounding skills that reduce pain perception and stress. You will also learn how to apply these techniques in everyday situations to maintain calm and focus.
- You will develop a personalised relapse prevention plan that includes early warning signs, coping strategies and support resources. You will also learn how to celebrate successes and sustain motivation over the long term.

PART 1

Understanding Your Condition

Psychoeducation for Long-Term Conditions and Chronic Pain

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Keeping Well After Living Well

Welcome to the Keeping Well After Living Well programme. This guided self-help course is designed for anyone living with a long-term physical health condition or persistent chronic pain. If you have already completed our initial Living Well course, this seven-part series is built to help you consolidate your progress, maintain your hard-won improvements, and continue applying practical self-management strategies in your daily life. Each module is structured to take around 30 minutes, allowing you to work at your own comfortable pace alongside the support of your trained therapist.

In this first module, titled Understanding Your Condition, we explore the foundational knowledge you need to navigate your health day by day. Living with a persistent health condition or ongoing pain affects far more than just your physical body; it touches every aspect of your life, including your emotions, energy levels, and daily activities.

A NOTE

Understanding how your condition interacts with your thoughts and behaviours is the first step towards regaining a sense of control and improving your overall quality of life.

By the end of this module, you will have a clearer picture of the body-mind connection, a better understanding of how the cycle of symptoms and stress can perpetuate distress, and an introduction to how cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) principles can support you. Let us take this first step together by looking closely at your current experience.

CHAPTER 2

The Body-Mind Connection in Long-Term Conditions

Welcome to the first module of Keeping Well After Living Well. You have already completed the Living Well course, which provided you with foundational tools to understand your condition and begin managing symptoms. This programme is designed to help you sustain those gains, prevent relapse, and navigate the inevitable ups and downs of living with a long-term condition or chronic pain. In this first module, we focus on psychoeducation: understanding the biological and psychological mechanisms that drive your symptoms. This knowledge is not just academic; it is the foundation upon which all subsequent practical strategies are built. When you understand why your body and mind respond in certain ways, you feel less confused and more empowered to take control.

Long-term conditions and chronic pain are often described as ‘invisible’ because they do not always show up on scans or blood tests, yet they profoundly impact daily life. A key concept to grasp is the biopsychosocial model. This model suggests that your health is not determined by biology alone (such as genetics or tissue damage) but is also influenced by psychological factors (thoughts, emotions, coping styles) and social factors (support networks, work environment, cultural beliefs). For example, if you have chronic lower back pain, the ‘bio’ part might involve muscle tension or joint wear. The ‘psycho’ part might include fear of movement or anxiety about worsening. The ‘social’ part might involve a lack of support at home or a workplace that does not accommodate your needs. All three interact. If you ignore the psycho and social components, focusing only on the bio part, you may find that your symptoms persist despite medical treatment.

Chronic pain, in particular, is often misunderstood as a direct signal of ongoing tissue damage. While acute pain serves a protective function, alerting you to injury, chronic pain often becomes a maladaptive response. The nervous system can become sensitised, meaning it sends pain signals even when there is no new injury. This is known as central sensitisation. Imagine your body’s alarm system: in a healthy state, it only rings when there is a fire. In chronic pain, the alarm might ring when there is only a small spark, or even when there is no fire at all. This does not mean the pain is ‘imagined’ or ‘in your head’; it is a real physiological response, but one that is being driven by neurological changes rather than just structural damage. Understanding this distinction is crucial because it shifts the focus from ‘fixing’ the body to ‘retraining’ the nervous system and managing the response.

Think of your body like a house in a storm. The storm (the condition) is real and powerful. You cannot stop the storm, but you can reinforce the windows (physical health), keep the heating on (self-care), and decide how you spend your time inside (behavioural activation). If you spend all day staring out the window at the rain (ruminating on pain), you will feel colder and more anxious. If you turn on the lights and engage in a calm activity, you may still feel the storm, but you will not be overwhelmed by it. The goal is not to eliminate the storm, but to build resilience so that the storm does not dictate your entire day.

It is also important to recognise that long-term conditions often come with a process of grief. You may grieve the loss of your previous health, your ability to do certain activities, or your sense of

identity. This grief is a normal and healthy response. However, if this grief becomes stuck, it can lead to depression or anxiety, which in turn can amplify pain and fatigue. This is where the mind-body connection becomes particularly evident. Stress and negative emotions can increase muscle tension and inflammation, creating a vicious cycle. For instance, feeling anxious about a flare-up can cause your muscles to tighten, which increases pain, which increases anxiety. Breaking this cycle requires addressing both the physical and emotional components simultaneously.

A NOTE

Key Point: Your symptoms are real, but they are not solely determined by the extent of physical damage. Psychological and social factors play a significant role in how you experience and manage your condition. By understanding these factors, you can identify specific targets for change.

As you progress through this module, you will begin to map out your own biopsychosocial profile. This will help you identify which factors are currently maintaining your distress. For example, you might discover that your pain is worse on days when you feel isolated or when you have been sitting for long periods. These insights are not meant to blame you; rather, they are meant to empower you. You are not a passive victim of your condition. You are an active participant in your health, and by understanding the mechanisms at play, you can make informed choices that lead to better outcomes. In the next section, we will explore the specific cycle of pain, thoughts, and behaviours that often maintains distress, providing you with a clearer picture of how these elements interact in your daily life.

Remember, this is a journey, not a race. There will be days when you feel overwhelmed, and that is okay. The goal is to build a toolkit that you can use consistently, even on difficult days. By the end of this module, you will have a deeper understanding of your condition and a clearer sense of how CBT can help you manage it. This knowledge will serve as the foundation for the practical strategies we will explore in the following modules. Take your time with this section, and reflect on how these concepts apply to your own experience. Your insights will be valuable as you move forward.