Keeping Well After Disordered Eating: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After Disordered Eating: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

An NHS-aligned guided self-help programme to maintain progress, manage setbacks, and foster long-term recovery.

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

TALKING THERAPIES UK

First edition · 2026

Published by Talking Therapies UK, talkingtherapies.co.uk.

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Keeping Well After Disordered Eating: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse 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 7 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 guided self-help programme is designed to help individuals maintain gains made in recovering from disordered eating and prevent future setbacks. Drawing upon evidence-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Eating Disorders (CBT-ED) and compassionate mind techniques, the course equips you with practical strategies to manage ongoing triggers. You will learn to distinguish between minor slips and full relapses while embedding healthier patterns of regular eating and self-care. By strengthening your self-worth beyond shape and weight, this course supports long-term recovery and personal resilience.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After Disordered Eating: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse 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 review your progress so far and recognise that recovery is rarely a linear path. You will learn to distinguish between minor lapses and full relapses to avoid falling into all-or-nothing thinking. Finally, you will identify your personal strengths and core motivations for staying well.
- You will reinforce the habit of regular, planned eating to maintain physical stability and manage hunger cues effectively. You will identify remaining rigid food rules and develop strategies to introduce flexibility into your diet safely. You will also practice light self-monitoring techniques to maintain awareness without feeling controlled by food.

- You will learn to identify your specific high-risk triggers, such as stress, life transitions, or social pressures. You will develop a personal list of early warning signs that indicate a return to disordered eating thoughts or habits. This awareness will enable you to intervene early before small difficulties become larger setbacks.
- You will explore the relationship between emotional distress and disordered eating behaviours like restriction, purging, or bingeing. You will learn evidence-based distress tolerance and self-soothing skills to navigate difficult feelings safely. Through self-compassion exercises, you will replace harsh self-criticism with supportive internal dialogue.
- You will examine how evaluating your worth based on body shape or weight impacts your daily wellbeing. You will practice body neutrality techniques to reduce body checking, avoidance, and negative comparison habits. Furthermore, you will begin reclaiming your identity by connecting with personal values unrelated to appearance.
- You will synthesise key learnings into a tailored, step-by-step relapse prevention blueprint. You will detail specific action steps to take if you notice early warning signs or experience a slip. You will also establish clear boundaries and guidelines for maintaining health during future life changes.
- You will learn how to review your wellness plan regularly and make adjustments as your life circumstances evolve. You will practice asking for help effectively from friends, family, or healthcare professionals when needed. Finally, you will build confidence in your ability to maintain recovery independently while staying connected to appropriate support.

PART 1

Understanding Your Journey and the Recovery Process

Reflecting on progress made and understanding the difference between slips and relapses.

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Module 1: Understanding Your Journey and the Recovery Process

You've already taken brave steps towards a healthier relationship with food and body, and this programme is here to help you keep that momentum going. Over the next seven modules you'll learn practical, evidence-based tools from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Eating Disorders (CBT-ED) and compassionate-mind techniques, all designed to support you in maintaining the gains you've already made.

In Module 1 we'll pause to look back at where you've come from, explore the difference between a slip and a relapse, and identify the strengths and core motivations that will keep you on track. Recovery is rarely a straight line – it's a series of small wins and occasional setbacks. By recognising this pattern early, you'll avoid the all-or-nothing thinking that can derail progress.

A NOTE

Tip: Keep a simple journal of your thoughts and feelings each day. Even a one-sentence note can help you spot patterns before they become problems.

A slip might be skipping a meal once because you're feeling stressed. A relapse is a sustained return to disordered eating behaviours that undermines your progress. Understanding this distinction helps you respond appropriately – a slip can be managed with a quick recovery plan, whereas a relapse may need a more structured approach.

"Recovery is not a destination but a journey. Every step, even the small ones, counts." – Anonymous

By the end of this module you'll be able to:

- Reflect on the progress you've made so far.
- Distinguish between minor lapses and full relapses.
- Identify your personal strengths and core reasons for staying well.

Let's begin by looking back at your journey and setting a solid foundation for the road ahead.

CHAPTER 2

Welcome and orientation: your recovery journey so far

Welcome to module one of Keeping Well After Disordered Eating: Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse. This programme is designed for anyone who has made meaningful changes in their relationship with food, eating and body image, and who now wants to protect and build on those changes. Whether you have completed a formal treatment programme, worked with a therapist in the past, or made changes on your own, the courage you are showing by deciding to focus on staying well deserves genuine acknowledgment. Recovery is not simply the end of treatment; it is an ongoing, active process, and this course is here to walk alongside you.

Over the next seven modules, we will explore together the practical skills that help people maintain their gains and reduce the risk of relapse. This module starts by helping you understand your journey so far. Later modules will cover regular eating, managing emotions, tackling unhelpful thoughts, building a meaningful life, and creating a personal crisis plan. Each module builds on the last, so it is worth working through them in order. The approach draws on evidence-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Eating Disorders, often called CBT-ED, alongside compassionate mind techniques. That means we will focus on changing unhelpful patterns, but always with a kind, non-judgemental attitude towards yourself. You are not being asked to be perfect; you are being asked to be curious, honest and willing to try.

You may be reading this module feeling a mixture of hope and uncertainty. Perhaps you have already noticed huge improvements, such as being able to eat without panic, or feeling less preoccupied with shape and weight. Or perhaps you fear that your progress feels fragile, as though one wrong move could send you backwards. Both of these experiences are common and understandable. It is precisely because recovery can feel fragile that a course like this exists. The aim is not to add another set of rules to your life, but to help you develop a flexible and resilient mindset that can adapt to the ups and downs of everyday living.

One of the most important ideas to hold onto is that recovery is rarely a straight line. Think of a child learning to ride a bicycle: there are wobbles, near misses, maybe a fall, and then eventually longer stretches of confident riding. Even after learning, there are days when the balance feels harder, perhaps because of tiredness, stress or wind. That does not mean the child has forgotten how to ride. It just means conditions are harder. Recovery from disordered eating works in a similar way. There will be good weeks, difficult weeks, and many ordinary weeks in between. What matters is not that your path is perfectly smooth, but that you keep returning to the direction that matters to you.

Before we go further, let us acknowledge the progress you have already made. Sometimes people dismiss their own achievements because the eating disorder voice is still loud. It may tell you that you have not done enough, that you are not really recovered, or that you are simply fooling yourself. Those thoughts are part of the problem, not a reflection of the truth. If you can, take a moment to think back to a time before you began making changes. What was different? Perhaps meals were dominated by anxiety, or you avoided social events involving food, or you spent hours checking your body in the mirror. Now, what is better? Maybe you can eat a wider range of foods,

or sit with discomfort without immediately acting on it, or have a day when food does not dominate your mind. Even small improvements are real and important.

Priya finished a course of outpatient treatment for anorexia nervosa feeling relieved but frightened. In treatment, she had restored her weight and learned to eat regularly with support. After discharge, her first month went surprisingly well. She cooked balanced meals, met friends for coffee, and even wore a pair of jeans that had been too tight before. Then came a busy period at work. She missed lunch twice, and one evening she skipped dinner because she felt too anxious. The old voice returned: "I'm slipping back." Priya felt ashamed and almost gave up trying. In her next review, she was encouraged to see this not as evidence of failure but as a normal response to stress. She made a plan to return to regular meals, and within a week she felt steadier. Looking back, Priya realised that her recovery had never been a smooth upward slope. It was more like a path with a few muddy patches. The important thing was that she kept walking.

The idea of recovery as non-linear is not just encouraging; it is also clinically realistic. In CBT-ED, one of the key skills is learning to respond to setbacks using the same strategies that helped you originally, rather than treating a setback as proof that recovery has failed. This is sometimes called "coping with setbacks" or "relapse prevention", and it rests on the understanding that a lapse is not the same as a relapse. We will look at this distinction in more detail shortly. For now, simply notice how easy it is for the eating disorder mind to think in extremes. One skipped meal becomes "I am back to square one". One difficult body image day becomes "I am trapped in the old patterns forever". This all-or-nothing thinking is one of the strongest drivers of relapse, because it can make any slip feel catastrophic and therefore not worth repairing.

A NOTE

A kind alternative to all-or-nothing thinking: try saying to yourself, "Progress often wobbles. A difficult moment does not undo the skills I have learned. It is information, not a verdict on my whole recovery." This is not about pretending everything is fine; it is about refusing to turn one tree into the whole forest.

As you begin this programme, we invite you to bring a spirit of curiosity. You are not here to be graded. You are here to understand yourself better, to notice what helps you stay well, and to build a future in which food and body concerns take up less and less space. We will ask you later in this module to think about your strengths and your personal reasons for wanting to keep well. For now, simply sit with the idea that your journey so far has included many acts of courage. You have already done difficult things. This next stage is not about being perfect; it is about learning to stay on your own side, especially when the path becomes uneven.

Later in this module, we will define the difference between a slip and a relapse, and you will learn why this distinction matters. We will also help you identify the personal strengths that have carried you this far and the core motivations that can sustain you in the future. But first, let us settle into the understanding that recovery is an ongoing process, not a destination. You are not starting again. You are continuing a journey that has already taken strength, persistence and hope.