Staying on Track with Anxiety: A Guided Self-Help Programme

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Staying on Track with Anxiety: A Guided Self-Help Programme

Maintaining progress and preventing relapse after CBT

A self-help workbook · 8 modules · about 8 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Staying on Track with Anxiety: A Guided Self-Help Programme 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 9 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 is designed to help you build on the skills and insights gained from your CBT therapy, and to prevent relapse of anxiety symptoms. It's based on evidence from research on relapse prevention and maintenance of therapy gains, including Marlatt and Gordon's relapse prevention model, Prochaska and DiClemente's transtheoretical model of change, and the principles of mindfulness-based stress reduction. It is written for people finishing a course of CBT for anxiety with a therapist; if you have completed our CBT for Anxiety programme, Keeping Well After CBT for Anxiety is the companion written to follow it. By following this programme, you'll learn how to identify high-risk situations, develop a relapse prevention plan, and maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

This workbook is the written form of the Staying on Track with Anxiety: A Guided Self-Help Programme 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 8 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

- By the end of this module, you'll be able to identify your personal risk factors for relapse, understand the early warning signs of relapse, and develop a greater awareness of the situations and emotions that may trigger anxiety.
- This module will help you develop a daily routine that promotes relaxation and reduces stress,

including strategies for managing time, prioritising self-care, and maintaining a healthy sleep schedule.

- You'll learn how to use mindfulness and relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness meditation, to manage anxiety and reduce stress in the moment.
- This module will help you develop a plan for coping with situations and emotions that trigger anxiety, including how to challenge negative thoughts, use problem-solving skills, and seek social support.
- You'll learn how to build and maintain a support network of family, friends, and professionals, and how to ask for help when you need it.
- This module will help you develop a relapse prevention plan, including identifying high-risk situations, developing coping strategies, and setting goals for maintaining your mental health.
- You'll learn how to stay motivated and engaged in your mental health journey, including strategies for monitoring your progress, celebrating successes, and addressing setbacks.
- In this final module, you'll reflect on your progress, identify areas for further development, and plan for the future, including how to maintain your mental health and well-being.

PART 1

Understanding Relapse

Recognising the signs and risks of relapse

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Module 1: Understanding Relapse

Welcome to Module 1 of the Staying on Track with Anxiety programme. This module is an important part of your journey to maintaining the gains you've made in your CBT therapy and preventing relapse of anxiety symptoms. In this module, you'll learn how to identify your personal risk factors for relapse, understand the early warning signs of relapse, and develop a greater awareness of the situations and emotions that may trigger anxiety. By the end of this module, you'll have a better understanding of what you need to do to stay on track and maintain your mental wellbeing. This module is based on the principles of the Transtheoretical Model of Change and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, which have been shown to be effective in preventing relapse and maintaining therapy gains. Throughout this module, you'll be encouraged to reflect on your personal experiences and develop a plan to stay on track with your anxiety management. So, let's get started!

CHAPTER 2

Welcome to Staying on Track with Anxiety: Understanding the Relapse Prevention Journey

Welcome to the first module of 'Staying on Track with Anxiety: A Guided Self-Help Programme'. As you begin this journey, it is important to first orientate yourself to the overall structure and purpose of this 8-module programme. Having previously engaged in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), you have already taken courageous and significant steps towards understanding your anxiety, challenging unhelpful thought patterns, and changing your behavioural responses. This guided self-help programme is deliberately designed to help you consolidate those hard-won gains, bridge the gap between active therapy and independent living, and act as a robust relapse prevention toolkit. Based firmly on evidence-based research regarding the maintenance of therapeutic gains—including the foundational principles of relapse prevention established by Marlatt and Gordon, alongside insights from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction—this programme acknowledges that recovery is not a rigid, linear destination. Instead, learning to manage anxiety is an ongoing, dynamic process of maintaining balance, recognising shifting internal and external landscapes, and responding skilfully when life inevitably presents new stressors.

To understand relapse in the context of anxiety, we must first demystify what the term actually means. In clinical practice, 'relapse' can sometimes sound alarming, evoking images of a sudden, catastrophic return to square one, as though all the progress you made in therapy has been completely wiped out. However, evidence-based psychological practice views relapse much more gently and realistically. A relapse, or a recurrence of anxiety symptoms, is rarely an abrupt cliff-edge fall. Rather, it is typically a gradual process that unfolds over weeks or even months. It begins long before physical or emotional symptoms of anxiety feel overwhelming again. By reframing relapse as a process rather than a sudden event, we empower ourselves. If relapse is a process made up of smaller, interconnected steps, choices, and shifts in perspective, then it follows that we can learn to spot those early steps and intervene long before anxiety takes the steering wheel once more.

Consider how anxiety operates in daily life after formal therapy concludes. When you finished therapy, you likely left with a personalised formulation—a blueprint of how your specific triggers, thoughts, bodily sensations, and safety behaviours interacted to keep your anxiety cycle spinning. You learned how to step back from catastrophic thoughts, how to face feared situations through graded exposure, and how to soothe your nervous system. These tools did not magically disappear just because therapy sessions ended, but it is entirely natural for the deliberate practice of these skills to become more automatic, and occasionally, to slip quietly into the background of a busy life. When we feel well, we naturally stop doing the daily maintenance work that kept us well. We drop our mindfulness practices, we avoid minor discomforts because we are tired, or we let our self-care routines slide. This is not a personal failure; it is simply human nature. Yet, when these small foundational habits erode, our psychological resilience slowly thins out.

A NOTE

Remember that experiencing anxiety is a normal part of being human. Relapse prevention is not about eliminating all anxiety forever—which is an impossible and exhausting goal—but rather about changing your relationship with anxiety so that it no longer runs your life.

To make this concrete, let us look at a detailed worked example of how the relapse process quietly begins without any dramatic crisis.

Sarah completed CBT for generalised anxiety and panic twelve months ago. During therapy, she learned to recognise how worrying about her workload and health would trigger physical symptoms of dizziness and rapid heartbeat, which she would then misinterpret as signs of a serious medical emergency. Through therapy, Sarah learned to challenge catastrophic thoughts, stopped checking her pulse constantly, and successfully returned to social events and demanding work projects.

Over the past year, Sarah's life has been relatively calm. However, her company recently underwent a restructure, and her workload doubled. Initially, Sarah coped well, relying on her CBT toolkits. But as the pressure mounted, she began working longer hours. To protect her time for work, she stopped attending her weekly yoga class—her primary mindfulness practice—and began skipping her morning walks. She told herself she didn't have time for self-care right now.

Two months into the high-stress period, Sarah noticed she was starting to feel breathless when checking her emails in the morning. Instead of using her deep-breathing techniques, she quickly closed her laptop and distracted herself with social media. A week later, she declined an invitation to dinner with friends, thinking, 'I'm just too exhausted; I need to rest.' By the third month, Sarah found herself waking up at 3:00 AM every night with a pounding heart, worrying endlessly about her health and job security. The panic symptoms had returned in full force.

Looking back, Sarah's relapse did not start the night she woke up with a pounding heart. It started months earlier, when the chronic pressure of the restructure led her to quietly abandon the daily maintenance behaviours—mindfulness, movement, and structured problem-solving—that kept her anxiety in check. Her tolerance for normal stress had worn thin, paving the way for the anxiety cycle to re-establish itself.

Sarah's experience illustrates a crucial concept in relapse prevention: the erosion of coping reserve. Just as a bank account requires regular deposits to maintain a healthy balance, our psychological resilience requires ongoing, gentle maintenance. When we stop making those small daily deposits—such as checking in with our emotions, engaging in scheduled relaxation, or challenging minor unhelpful thoughts—our psychological balance drops into the red. When an unexpected life stressor hits, we find ourselves overdrawn and unable to cope using our usual adaptive strategies. Instead, our brains default to older, well-worn neural pathways of worry, avoidance, and physical hyperarousal.

As you move through this first module, take a moment to reflect gently on your own post-therapy life. Have there been habits, routines, or coping strategies that you practised diligently during therapy, but which have slowly slipped away over time? Recognising these subtle shifts is not a reason for self-criticism or shame; rather, it is the very first step towards reclaiming your balance.

By shining a compassionate light on how relapse develops as a gradual process, you open up the possibility of catching those early shifts long before they gather momentum.