Keeping Well After CBT for Anxiety: Staying on Track & Preventing Relapse

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After CBT for Anxiety: Staying on Track & Preventing Relapse

Guided self-help (Step 2 equivalent) for people finishing CBT for anxiety

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

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Keeping Well After CBT for Anxiety: Staying on Track & 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 6. This printing was set on 8 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 helps you maintain the gains you made from CBT for anxiety and reduce the chance of relapse. You'll use evidence-based CBT relapse-prevention strategies, including a personalised maintenance plan, structured "if–then" coping, and gradual exposure to feared situations. It draws on well-established approaches such as cognitive restructuring, behavioural activation principles, and relapse prevention techniques used in stepped care. You will also learn how to respond early to warning signs, so anxiety doesn't take over again.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After CBT for Anxiety: Staying on Track & 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 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

- You will identify your personal warning signs, triggers, and the patterns that helped you improve during CBT. You will describe your current strengths and what 'staying well' means in everyday life.
- You will learn a clear model of relapse (warning signs › coping changes › unhelpful cycles › symptoms returning). You will apply this model to your own history to predict where things might go off track.
- You will practise a brief 'early response' routine (check thoughts, body signals, and safety

behaviours). You will create an action list for the first 24–72 hours when symptoms begin to rise.

- You will plan how to continue or restart exposure at the right level to avoid both avoidance and over-pushing. You will use a simple plan to track what you did, what changed, and what you learned.
- You will revisit common unhelpful thinking patterns (e.g., threat overestimation, reassurance seeking, intolerance of uncertainty) and practise balanced, evidence-based alternatives. You will learn how to respond to anxious thoughts without needing to eliminate them first.
- You will identify your personal safety behaviours and how they may reappear under stress. You will develop safer alternatives and apply gradual reduction so you can stay engaged with life.
- You will plan practical routines that support recovery (sleep, activity, pacing, and problem-solving) and reduce vulnerability to relapse. You will practise a brief wellbeing check-in to spot when habits are drifting.
- You will create a personalised relapse prevention plan with triggers, early actions, exposure steps, and coping statements. You will rehearse an ‘if–then’ strategy for likely setbacks and set realistic goals for ongoing self-help.

PART 1

Your maintenance plan: what recovery looks like for you

Reviewing progress, values, and early goals

CHAPTER 1

Orientation: your maintenance plan starts here

Welcome to Module 1 of “Keeping Well After CBT for Anxiety: Staying on Track & Preventing Relapse”. This programme is designed to help you protect the progress you’ve already made. In CBT, you built skills to manage anxiety—changing unhelpful thoughts, facing feared situations in a planned way, and taking actions that support your wellbeing. The goal now is to make those skills more automatic, so you can spot trouble early and respond before anxiety takes over.

In step-2 guided self-help, each module focuses on a practical part of relapse prevention. By the end, you’ll have a personal maintenance plan: a clear way to notice early warning signs, use “if–then” coping steps, and continue with gentle, structured exposure where it suits you. You’ll also learn how to keep doing the things that matter to you, even when anxiety is present.

For this module, we’ll start by answering a simple question: what does recovery look like for you day to day? “Staying well” doesn’t mean anxiety disappears completely. It usually means you can recognise when you’re getting off track, recover more quickly, and keep moving towards your values.

You’ll begin by reviewing your progress and what you learned about yourself. Then you’ll identify your personal triggers, patterns, and early warning signs. Finally, we’ll set a few early goals—small enough to be realistic, clear enough to guide you when things feel a bit wobbly.

CHAPTER 2

Reviewing your progress: what helped you improve (and what you learned about yourself)

To stay well after CBT, it helps to be able to describe your improvement in concrete terms. Many people remember they "got better", but relapse prevention works better when you can clearly link improvement to specific actions, skills, and changes in how you interpret anxiety.

In CBT for anxiety, progress is usually not one thing—it's the combined effect of learning new ways to respond and testing them in real life. Maintenance works when you keep those learning experiences alive.

For this section, think back to your CBT period and identify:

1. The problem pattern(s) you had before CBT (for example, avoidance, reassurance seeking, safety behaviours, overestimating threat, intolerance of uncertainty, rumination).

2. The key skills or strategies that shifted the pattern (for example, cognitive restructuring, exposure work, behavioural experiments, problem-solving, mindfulness of sensations without adding panic interpretations, and scheduling valued activities).

3. The change in your beliefs about anxiety (for example, "Anxiety is uncomfortable but not dangerous", "I can cope even if I feel uncomfortable", "I don't need certainty to act", or "I can handle uncertainty").

4. The behavioural changes that supported recovery (for example, gradually approaching feared situations, using coping cards, reducing reassurance, and practising responses rather than waiting for certainty).

It can also help to notice that your improvement likely depended on timing and conditions. For instance, some people do better when they have a predictable routine; others do better when they stay socially connected; others notice that symptoms reduce when they stop feeding the anxiety cycle with avoidance or checking.

Below is a worked example showing how to turn vague memory into a clear maintenance picture.

Imagine someone whose main issue was fear of dizziness leading to panic. During CBT, they learned that dizziness sensations were not a sign of imminent danger, and they practised standing up more quickly, walking in the supermarket, and staying in environments that previously triggered avoidance. They also reduced safety behaviours (such as holding their breath, repeatedly sitting down "just in case", and constant checking).

After CBT, their improvement has several building blocks:

- Cognitive shift: They replaced thoughts like "I'm going to faint" with more balanced interpretations such as "This is a physical sensation; I can ride it out."
- Behavioural shift: They reduced avoidance and re-entry time (for example, doing shorter but more frequent exposure practices).

- Coping response: They used a brief grounding or breathing strategy, but importantly they did not use it to try to eliminate sensations instantly.
- Values-based activity: They resumed work-related tasks and social plans that mattered to them.

So in maintenance, they don't only say "I should keep doing exposure." They know what exposure looked like for them (approach steps they practised), what thoughts were relevant (fainting predictions), and what safety behaviours were the trap (constant checking and instant retreat). They also know what supported them (regular practice and returning to valued activities).

Your job in Module 1 is to build a similar "map" for yourself. This is not about listing everything you remember; it is about identifying the patterns that matter. A maintenance plan works best when it is tailored to the specific cycles that previously kept anxiety going.

You might also find it useful to notice which parts of CBT were most durable. For example, some people discover that cognitive skills helped when they were moderately anxious, while exposure practice was what helped most during peak anxiety. Others learn that activity scheduling made exposure easier by reducing how drained they felt.

Maintenance is also strengthened by identifying your current strengths. Strengths might include:

- You can recognise anxiety signals earlier now.
- You can tolerate physical discomfort better than before.
- You can challenge "catastrophic" predictions more quickly.
- You have experience with graded exposure.
- You have a routine that supports wellbeing.

Even if your symptoms have not completely disappeared, you may still have meaningful recovery. CBT gains can show up as:

- Reduced frequency or intensity of anxious episodes.
- Less time spent engaging in avoidance.
- Faster recovery after symptoms flare.
- Greater ability to do what you value while anxious.

This is important: staying well is about functioning and coping, not only about symptom absence.

A NOTE

Information: In relapse prevention, we treat "slips" as data. If anxiety returns, it usually tells us which old pattern is trying to restart—avoidance, threat interpretation, reassurance seeking, or withdrawal from valued activity.

Finally, remember that change often came with practice. If you lost confidence at any point during CBT, it is worth considering what helped you through. Many people rely on a combination of: being kinder to themselves, reminding themselves of past evidence, using a structure for coping, and getting back on track quickly after a missed practice.

As you review your progress, try to answer for yourself: "If I start to unravel, what would I most likely do first?" That awareness will guide your early goals in this module.

When you can explain what helped you improve, you are less likely to rely on willpower alone.

You'll have a "menu" of strategies that you know work in your context, and you'll be able to choose them before anxiety expands.