Keeping Well After CBT for Depression

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After CBT for Depression

Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

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 CBT for Depression 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 4. 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 guided self-help programme helps people who have completed CBT for depression to maintain the gains they have made and to reduce the risk of relapse. It draws on the robust evidence base for CBT, including meta-analyses showing that ongoing maintenance strategies cut relapse rates by up to 50 %. The course combines clear psycho-education with practical skills and a personalised relapse-prevention plan, all delivered in a step-by-step format suitable for NHS step-2 level support.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After CBT for Depression 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 be able to describe how depression can recur and why maintenance work is important. You will understand the core principles of CBT that continue to support wellbeing after formal therapy ends.
- You will learn to identify personal early warning signs of low mood. You will be able to use a simple monitoring chart to track mood changes and trigger timely action.
- You will refresh the skill of planning pleasant and meaningful activities. You will create a flexible weekly activity plan that fits with current life demands.

- You will revisit the ABC model and practice updating unhelpful thoughts. You will develop a quick-reference sheet for challenging negative thinking in everyday situations.
- You will assemble a personalised plan that includes warning signs, coping strategies, and support contacts. You will know how to review and adjust the plan regularly.
- You will map your key sources of social support and learn how to ask for help when needed. You will set realistic goals for sleep, physical activity and nutrition that protect mood.
- You will review the skills you have rehearsed and assess confidence in using them. You will create a forward-looking checklist to guide future self-monitoring and help-seeking.

PART 1

Understanding Depression and CBT Maintenance

Why staying well matters after therapy

CHAPTER 1

Welcome and Orientation: Staying Well After Therapy

Welcome to the first module of Keeping Well After CBT for Depression. Whether you finished your formal cognitive behavioural therapy weeks ago or months ago, taking this step shows a real commitment to your ongoing wellbeing. This guided self-help programme is designed to help you hold onto the gains you worked so hard to achieve and to significantly reduce the risk of future relapse. Drawing on robust clinical evidence—including meta-analyses showing that active maintenance strategies can cut relapse rates by up to 50%—this course bridges the gap between structured therapy and everyday life.

A NOTE

NHS step-2 guided self-help is built on the idea that you are the expert in your own life. This programme provides the tools; you provide the lived experience and practice.

Over the coming modules, we will combine clear, practical concepts with structured exercises to help you spot early warning signs, challenge sneaky unhelpful thoughts, and build a robust, personalised relapse-prevention plan. In this opening module, titled Understanding Depression and CBT Maintenance, our focus is on why staying well matters after therapy ends and how the core principles of CBT continue to support you long after your last formal session. You do not need to do this all at once; take things at your own pace, and remember that maintenance is a normal, healthy part of living well.

CHAPTER 2

Welcome and Orientation: Staying Well After Therapy

Welcome to the first module of Keeping Well After CBT for Depression. As you begin this journey, it is important to orientate yourself to the whole programme and what it aims to achieve. This guided self-help course has been designed specifically for people like you who have completed a course of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for depression and want to protect the hard-won gains they have made. Over the coming seven modules, you will build a personal toolkit of maintenance skills rooted in the robust, evidence-based principles of CBT. Clinical trials and meta-analyses show that engaging in structured maintenance strategies after recovering from depression can cut the risk of relapse by up to 50 percent. This means that the work you do in this programme is one of the most powerful investments you can make in your long-term mental health.

When we finish formal therapy, it is very common to feel a mixture of relief and underlying anxiety. You might find yourself wondering: Will I stay well? What happens if the old feelings creep back? These are completely natural questions. Therapy gives you a powerful set of tools to navigate periods of low mood, but depression is an illness that has a habit of leaving deep memory traces in our brains. Think of this programme not as a continuation of crisis treatment, but as fitness training for your mind. Just as an athlete continues to train after winning a race to maintain their strength and stamina, learning how to stay well requires us to practice our psychological skills even when the sky is clear. Throughout these seven modules, we will help you bridge the gap between the structured support of a therapist's room and your everyday life, ensuring you remain the driver of your own wellbeing.

To understand why maintenance work is so vital, we first need to look closely at how depression recurs. Research consistently shows that depression is often an episodic condition. When we experience a depressive episode, our neural pathways—the communication routes between our brain cells—become deeply worn in particular patterns. Every time we experience negative thinking, withdrawal from activities, or self-criticism, these pathways get reinforced, forming a well-worn groove. CBT helps us carve out new, more helpful pathways, such as balanced thinking, gentle behavioural activation, and self-compassion. However, the old pathways do not simply vanish; they remain dormant beneath the surface. When life throws stressful events our way—such as bereavement, relationship difficulties, work stress, or physical illness—our brains naturally lean towards efficiency. Under stress, the brain often defaults back to its oldest, most familiar habits of thought and behaviour.

A NOTE

Remember that experiencing stress or a temporary dip in mood does not mean you are failing or sliding back into full depression. It simply means your mind is responding to pressure by reaching for familiar habits. Recognising this early is your greatest advantage.

Understanding this vulnerability helps remove the self-blame that often accompanies a recurrence of low mood. Many people believe that if depression returns, it means therapy failed or they are

somehow broken. In reality, it simply means that the vulnerability to low mood remains part of your human makeup, much like a susceptibility to physical ailments under cold weather. By accepting this reality, we can shift from a posture of fearful vigilance—worrying about every minor emotional wobble—to a posture of prepared resilience. We know the warning signs, we know what triggers our moods, and most importantly, we know which evidence-based tools work best to steady the ship.

Sarah completed CBT for recurrent depression six months ago. Initially, she felt wonderful and threw herself back into her busy life. However, when her department at work underwent a major restructure, she noticed her sleep starting to fragment, her shoulders growing tight, and the familiar voice of self-doubt whispering that she was going to fail her upcoming projects. In the past, Sarah would have panicked, hidden her struggles, and spiralled into a full depressive relapse, believing that therapy hadn't worked. Using the mindset cultivated through maintenance work, Sarah paused. She recognised that work stress was reactivating her old vulnerability pathways. Instead of seeing this as a crisis, she viewed it as an amber light. She deliberately dusted down her CBT formulation, scheduled time for pleasurable activities each evening, and used cognitive restructuring to challenge her catastrophic predictions about work. By taking early, intentional action, she prevented the dip from deepening into a full recurrence.

As you move through this first module, try to approach the material with curiosity and self-kindness. You are not starting from scratch; you already possess the foundational knowledge gained during your work with your therapist. This programme is here to help you dust off those skills, refine them, and weave them into the very fabric of your daily routine. By taking a proactive, steady approach to your mental health today, you are building a robust shield for tomorrow, ensuring that you can live a full, meaningful life even when life's inevitable storms arrive.